

SOUTH AFRICA'S LEADING GAMING, COMPUTER & TECHNOLOGY MAGAZINE

NAG

PC PLAYSTATION XBOX WII

PREVIEWS

Darksiders
Avatar
Epic Mickey
Metro 2033

DARKSIDERS

TWO DOUBLE AWESOME SCOOPS WITH
BRIMSTONE AND A LITTLE LAVA FUDGE

REVIEWS

Aion | Operation Flashpoint: Dragon Rising
Borderlands | Brutal Legend | Uncharted 2:
Among Thieves | Forza Motorsport 3 | Tekken 6
FIFA 10 | PES 2010 | Section 8



Drama and intrigue... The local DVD production company went bang, so we had to have this one done overseas. So, if it's missing, it will have something to do with international treaties and undercover spy stuff. You wouldn't understand. Hell, we don't even understand.

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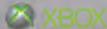
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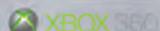
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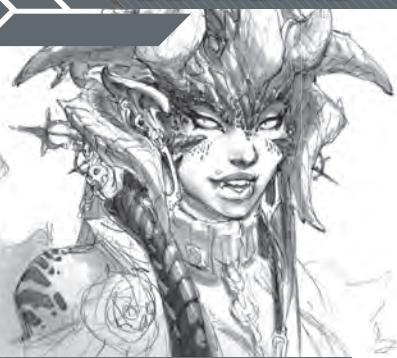
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ATI Catalyst Drivers 9.10 Vista + Vista 64 | NVIDIA ForceWare 191.07 WHQL Vista + Vista 64

Extras

Benchmark Tools - Heaven Benchmark | CheatBook Database 2009 + 2009 Updates | Dragon Age: Origins - Character Creator | Drive Magazine November 2009 | Free Games - Death Rally & Warsaw v0.42 | Laura Shigihara - Zombies on Your Lawn MP3

Patches

Nothing major was released

Videos

A Boy And His Blob - Boss Battle Trailer | Aliens vs. Predator - Alien Mechanics Interview | Assassin's Creed II - Animus and Combat Interview | Assassin's Creed Lineage - Part 1 HD | Battlefield: Bad Company 2 - Limited Edition Trailer | Bayonetta - Grace and Glory Trailer | Bayonetta - The Devil's In The Details Documentary | Bayonetta - Transformations Trailer | Beatmania IIDX 16 Empress + Premium Best - Unicorn Tail | BioShock 2 - Capture the Sister Trailer | BioShock 2 - Characters and Story Interview | BioShock 2 - Combat Interview | BioShock 2 - Montage | BioShock 2 - Multiplayer Mechanics Interview | Blur - Power-Ups Trailer | Borderlands - Launch Trailer | Borderlands - TV Commercial | Brütal Legend - Cast of Rock Legends Documentary | Brütal Legend - First RTS Mission Trailer | Champions Online - Bloodmoon Developer Diary | CryEngine 3 - Beauty Speed Interaction Trailer | CSI: Deadly Intent - Launch Trailer | Dark Void - Mash-Up Interview | Dead to Rights: Retribution - Combat Documentary | Dementium 2 - Phase One Trailer | DIRT 2 - DirectX 11 Technology Demo | Divinity 2 Ego Draconis - Broken Valley Trailer | DJ Hero - Eclectic Method Mashup Trailer | Dragon Age: Origins - Deathbed Trailer | Dragon Age: Origins - Dragon Trailer | Dragon Age: Origins - Oghren Character Trailer | Dragon Age: Origins - Shut Up Tree Trailer | Dragon Age: Origins - Warden's Quest | Dust 514 - Debut Trailer | Excitebike: World Rally - Debut Trailer | Fairytale Fights - Launch Trailer | Fairytale Fights - Mirror Mirror Trailer | Fort Zombie - Choices Trailer | Forza Motorsport 3 - Critical Acclaim Trailer | Ghostwire: Link to the Paranormal - Debut Trailer | God of War III - Demo - Brutal | Grand Theft Auto: The Ballad of Gay Tony - Dancing | Halo Waypoint - Debut Walkthrough | Just Cause 2 - 'No Ordinary Mission' Trailer | Left 4 Dead 2 - Goals Interview | Left 4 Dead 2 - Survival 101 Viral Advert | LEGO Rock Band - Epic Tour Trailer | Lord of the Rings Online: Siege of Mirkwood - Debut Trailer | MAG - Massive Action Trailer Part 1 | MAG - Massive Action Trailer Part 2 | Matt Hazard: Blood Bath and Beyond - Pirate Trailer | Modern Warfare 2 Addresses F.A.G.S | Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time - Debut Film Trailer | R.U.S.E. - Pump Fake Strategy Walkthrough | Ratchet & Clank Future: A Crack in Time - Launch Trailer | Rocket Knight - Debut Trailer | Saw - Jigsaw's Traps Part 1 | Saw - Jigsaw's Traps Part 2 | Shadow Walker - Debut Trailer | Something About Cooking Mama 2 | StarCraft II - Battle Report 4 | SW Battlefront Elite Squadron - CTF Trailer | SW Battlefront Elite Squadron - Hoth Ground Battle | SW Battlefront Elite Squadron - Space Battle Trailer | Tekken 6 - Behind The Game Documentary | Tekken 6 - Miguel Intro | Tekken 6 - Montage | The Saboteur - Open World Walkthrough Part 1 | The Saboteur - Open World Walkthrough Part 2 | The Void - Debut Trailer | Torchlight - Brink Fight Trailer | Torchlight - Launch Trailer | Torchlight - Necropolis Trailer | Tropico 3 - Launch Trailer | Uncharted 2: Among Thieves - Behind The Scenes 1 - Technology | Uncharted 2: Among Thieves - Behind The Scenes 2 - Story and Art | Uncharted 2: Among Thieves - Behind The Scenes 3 - Making the Cinematics | Wii Fit Plus - Obstacle Course Trailer | Wii Fit Plus - Skateboard Trailer | Zeit 2 - Debut Trailer | Zombie Tycoon - Dancing In The Streets Trailer

ScrewAttack

Battleship | Captain Commando | Elmo's Number Journey | King of the Monsters | Mutant League Hockey

Retrospectives

Warcraft Retrospective Part 1 - 3



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Data Competition Monthly Prize Winners
J.Brownbridge, N.Fong, I.Labuschagne and B.Childs - each winning 1 of 4 Pro Evolution Soccer 2010 games + limited edition merchandise, on Playstation 3 or Xbox360. Sponsored by Ster Kinekor Entertainment.

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How can we help you?

I dedicate this to my beloved server; may you rest in piece

QUAKE IS... IS WHAT? NO, IT JUST IS.

Before I start, you'll read this news in two other places in NAG this month because it's just that epic. IS (Internet Solutions) is hosting a Quake Live server. So, go to www.quakelive.com and download / install all the required bits and pieces (remember, Explorer will require confirmation for some of the stuff). Register your details and when you can finally play online (after a quick training / skill placement session), select customise, then game location and then choose your local servers under ZAF, Johannesburg – thanks IS, you guys rock.

BEFORE...

This is what I wrote before Modern Warfare 2 was released...

I'll tell you what I have gone and done: I've uninstalled COD 4 from my computer. It felt like an official ceremony – removing a game I've loved and have been playing for years. It's time to move on people, I said, everything will be okay – despite all the rumours and negativity about the matchmaking and lack of dedicated servers. Give things a chance and trust Infinity Ward to deliver the goods, I said, and then if they decide it wasn't a great idea and change things (which they have said is a possibility), then let them do so. Peace.

AFTER...

Okay, now after playing it for the better part of a week I have to say that the matchmaking system doesn't work in South Africa; and from what I hear, neither in Australia nor in Brazil. Countries with Internet limitations due to their location on the globe cannot play this game online. With the old game (COD 4), I used to run around like a lunatic in the evenings, checking all the computers in the house for anything that might be updating or downloading, essentially interfering with my Call of Duty 4 and 5 playing. There's a science to online gaming in this country. It was so great to have

most of the local Internet service providers putting up dedicated servers. It was initially tricky to connect to them, but as South African PC gamers, we expect a little challenge with online play. Now we're [PC gamers] a little upset. What Infinity Ward has done is remove our ability to make informed decisions about how we want to play online games (low pings, people in the community we know, fun). My last nine online sessions have been disappointing, and like Quake Live (before IS put up local servers) I'm not going to be playing *Modern Warfare* online anymore.

It's a very difficult child to love in its current configuration. Fortunately, from what I've read between the lines, the developers did say that nothing is off the cards – let's hope they take the real feedback seriously among the ranting and raving. It's important to allow PC gamers to have options – this is why we choose this platform so we have total control over our gaming environment. Thank goodness, companies like DICE have come out loud and proud stating they will support dedicated servers and the ability to customise the experience. End of the day, fantastic job on *Modern Warfare*, Infinity Ward, but please fix the multiplayer because we really want to love this game but we can't play it right now.

ALSO MERRY 'BUTT LOAD OF GAMES RELEASED'!

Here at NAG, we don't really bow down to the commercial Christmas monster like all these lame shopping centres who tell their tenants to put up decorations in October already. All it means for us is more games to play. Have a good one and we'll see you all next year. Unless, of course, you drink and drive during the festive season; then, I guess, we'll say goodbye to you now.

Michael James
Captain, USG Ishimura

PS: *Borderlands*. What a game! Go play it.



Feature Comparison: COD4 vs. MW2 PC Multiplayer

Feature	Call of Duty: Modern Warfare	Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2
Networking	Client/Server	Peer-to-Peer
Avg. Ping (US broadband)	25-40ms	100ms+
Console Commands	Yes	No
Lean	Yes	No
Custom Maps	Yes	No
Number of Players	up to 64	up to 18
Competitive Mods	Yes	No
Mod Tools	Yes	No
Ability to Record	Yes	No
Kick/Ban Hackers Immediately	Yes	No
Profiles Saved Online	No	Yes
Manually Select Server to Join	Yes	No
Control Bad Language	Yes	No
0 Ping Advantage for Host	No	Yes
LAN Play	Yes	Yes
Free Demo	Yes	No
Price	\$50	\$60

SOURCE: <http://undead.mygameclan.com>

The big winner

Not sure how else to announce the winner of a R70K computer (we need a drum roll and stuff). Anyway, the winner of the rAge Rig is Heino Lilje from Piet Retief. Looks like we just upped the value of the whole town in one afternoon... Where is Piet Retief anyway?

Big news!

Now, this isn't something you see every day, so listen up. FNB Connect (check the advert on page 7) is sending someone and their friend to the Games Convention in Germany with R10,000 spending money. But that's not all... NAG is also going to be at the Games Convention and will be arranging some nice surprises for the trip too.

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No dedicated servers = FAIL.

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Letter of the Moment

FROM: Anton

SUBJECT: The Good, the Bad and the Alienated

"FIRST OF ALL LET'S get the brown nosi... I mean praise out of the way. Great magazine guys please keep up the good work, without you guys South Africa's gaming would be, well none existent. Now that the formalities are out the way, let's get down to it [*that felt a little fake, Ed*]. When reading the opinion columns (yes I am in fact aware that the magazine does not always share the same opinion) I often get a sense of alienation especially to our more hardcore brothers/sisters. I get that we or they (not quite sure if I fall within this demographic) can often be a little eccentric especially when it comes to their favourite games. I also know that they/we can often be very annoying especially when the term 'STFU n00b' is used. But this doesn't change the fact that we are all gamers and that we all share a common trait, no matter how much we deny this fact. This goes for everyone I suppose not just the guys at NAG HQ. Whether we are casual or hardcore gamers we all love our mock realities. So instead of alienating this group why not give them some love they/we might be annoying but they/we probably make up a great deal of the NAG buyers and therefore a great deal of your salaries. This is not to say that I don't value the opinions of the guys at NAG, in fact quite the opposite. All I'm asking is that instead of making fun of the hardcore guys be a little understanding and maybe show a little affiliation after all you guys do work at NAG the coolest and most hardcore gaming magazine in South Africa and maybe even the world."

I think it's best that we more or less clearly define the 'hardcore' gamers we make fun of. At NAG, the term "hardcore" is a sarcastic reference to the following type of person: Hardcore gamer doesn't move away from a computer screen for longer than ten minutes unless sleeping. They're always on some forum posting rubbish and regurgitating information they just read somewhere else in an effort to appear smart. They know everything about any game ever released or about to be released; they spend all their time online and they pirate games, movies and music (hell, even books). They never have anything good to say about anything, unless it's their one and only favourite game. They also bitch and moan a lot from their ivory towers. Do you get the idea? If this sounds like you, then yes... we are making fun of you. If not, then hopefully you now understand why we're not 'against' you. Ed.



The 'Letter of the Moment' prize is sponsored by Megarom. The winner receives two games for coming up with the most eclectic chicken scratch.

IMPORTANT STUFF! PAY ATTENTION!

Land Mail: P.O. Box 237, Olivedale, 2158

Cyber mail: letters@tidemedia.co.za

Important: Include your details when mailing us, otherwise how will you ever get your prize if you win...



FROM: Rudolf

SUBJECT: Everything makes sense now!

"WHY DOES EVERYTHING NEED to be complicated? And why is it sometimes such torture to find a right answer? For example: Mathematics always makes things so complicated and you are most of the time struggling to find an answer, but recently I acquired a pretty decent formula to spare myself lots much trouble! Take a look at this: Great reviews + Impressive previews + Excellent cover DVD x 120 Pages of Awesomeness = NAG. It can also be used like this: New Awesome Goodness = NAG – you can't argue, this is really true!"

*Not going to argue. You're right! NAG = pure military-grade awesome + rock and roll goodness * great writing - 'hardcore' gamers (see above) + a deep love of kittens and puppies. Ed.*

FROM: Blake

SUBJECT: Why?

"SOME PEOPLE AT MY school label me a nerd just because I play computer games! I throw all my game titles in their face and how in this and that you can cut them in half or cut off their head. No matter how violent the game they still liable me a nerd. I don't see anything wrong with being a nerd, but I am not a nerd! They say that playing PS2 and PS3 and Xbox and Wii is cool even if I play the same game that they play on a console (they only have PSP, Wii and PS2 and play card games that pretty much label them nerds!) they still call me a nerd! Why despite all evidence do they call me a nerd? Thank for a wonderful magazine, keep it up!"

I don't understand why you think that playing a violent game will change your perceived social status. I throw all my game titles in their face – this is antisocial behaviour and probably doesn't help. If you don't see anything wrong with being a nerd, then why are you trying so hard to prove that you're not? The most important thing to remember is to be yourself no matter what people say. Why do you seek their approval? They're all exactly the same as you anyway. Now don't go and wave this letter in their faces – that will be a nerd thing to do. Ed.

FROM: Devin

SUBJECT: Sample

"I AM A PS3 GAMER and basically the only one of my kind as my school is like an anti-gamer school, I am the only one who reads NAG and plays a lot of games. I am a devoted and faithful reader of NAG and have a subscription to NAG, so I get my NAG every month and take it to school where I am constantly mocked for reading NAG as they claim it is complete trash (they're idiots) and insulted and called a nerd because I play games like Street Fighter, Dead Space, Resistance, Fallout, Prototype, etc. They laugh at me when they see me trying to find the Badger (sneaky little bugger) or writing a rough letter that I will later send via E-mail to NAG (as I am constantly trying to win the

"Letter of the Moment" prize). Some go so far as trying to tear up my NAG, for instance this month I was reading the Borderlands preview in my new copy of NAG, when some dude came up and says that's a c**p game (personally I think it is the best and can't wait until I have enough to buy it) and tries to tear it out of my NAG. So I am pretty much alone when it comes to gaming at my school and all I want to say is that those guys are idiots and us gamers are human too (if not better :-]) and are legends! Thanks NAG for the best magazine ever!"

It's almost as if these letters are coming to us from the past – like 10-15 years ago. Same advice applied here. Ed.

FROM: Chad

SUBJECT: Request

"HEY NAG, MY NAME is Chad and I'm turning 13 on Wednesday 14th October and I was wondering if you guys/ladies wouldn't mind giving me some hardware (graphics cards, motherboards etc.) or can you give me the Intel basic gamer PC [supplier: *[goes on to actually list a supplier, Ed]*]. I know I sound very forward but it would mean a lot to me. You guys/ladies are my role models and one day I would personally work for NAG (New Age Gaming) myself. I got Transformers 2 on PS2 and I finished it in one night, I get your book every month and please don't send an email (I'm sending this from my dad's laptop) back saying yes and three or four weeks later and I still don't have it, because then I just made a complete idiot of myself. Please and thank you forever."

Yes Chad, of course we'll send you expensive PC hardware for nothing. You sure that's all? Would you like anything else? The reality: no, we won't be giving you anything for free. Here's why. You didn't give a good reason for wanting the free stuff (are you dying, handicapped in some way, etc.). You sent the mail to me and three random people at the company – not a good move if you're trying to get on our good/generous side. Finishing Transformers 2 in a night isn't an achievement (but actually playing it right through is!). And then, even if we did want to give you free stuff, how would we let you know, seeing that we can't send you a mail? Ed

FROM: Master

SUBJECT: A Little Charity Needed

"I WOULD LIKE TO KNOW if you have a Gaming laptop / gaming rig that needs a good home. I am a university student and my holiday is coming up, but I have no computer good enough to play any of the new games. I would really appreciate it, if you can give me something. By the way, NAG is the best gaming magazine since the invention of the computer."

What's up with these people? No, we don't have hundreds of computers in a store room somewhere just waiting to be given away to any beggar off the street. Stop asking – you're clogging up the Internet with stupidity. Ed.

FROM: Dawie

SUBJECT: Didn't put one in

"**I HAS COME TO** my attention that in general, we talk about JPEG's and Bitmaps but we don't really know the difference in compression ratios, picture quality etc., of all the different picture formats. Could you please publish an article on the topic? Explaining differences between RAW picture formats, and what happens when RAW pictures are converted to JPEG's or Bitmaps. Also how NAG goes about taking screen prints from different platforms and how it gets processed until the final shiny picture is in the magazine. Oh, and keep up the good work!"

Thanks for the kind words. To be honest, I don't have a clue about any of that stuff. Remember, I just play games here. To get screens into the magazine, we usually take them using dedicated screen-capturing software, choosing the 'save as' format we want. Otherwise, we get exclusive/unique high-resolution screens from the various developers (especially for console). If we're really desperate, there are various professional online resources we use. Ed.

FROM: Jodan

SUBJECT: New Rating System

"**I KNOW YOU GUYS HAVE** all the good ideas but hear me out."

No, we really do have all the good ideas. Thanks anyway. Ed.

FROM: Deward

SUBJECT: NAG

"**WHAT'S HAPPENING WITH THE**

magazine, I couldn't find it for the past two months? Has printing stopped or what seems to be the problem?"

No. This issue proves that it's still going strong... ;| To help you, I need to know where (exactly) you've been looking for NAG, so we can let our distribution company know, so we can fix it permanently. Also, depending on where you are in the country, NAG does sell out rather quickly in some areas. Remember, the next edition is usually on-shelf the last Friday of the month. Regardless, from this issue on, we are now printing more issues of NAG to feed the demand. Ed.

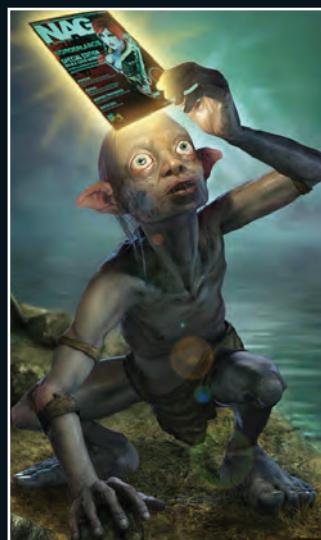
FROM: Alvin

SUBJECT: Dawn of Steam

"**I HATE STEAM. IT'S THE** worst anti-piracy measure that ever existed. Let me explain why I hate Steam so much. I bought Dawn of War 2 about a week ago. I got home I was excited to install the game and play it. On the back it states that you need an Internet connection to activate the game. So anyway, I run the setup and it says I need Steam client to install the game so I download it and it takes an age to update and load up. I'm a little frustrated. Then I start the installation process and it finishes the CD portion. There's no other prompt so I

NAG Fan artwork

This is the best of what we received during the month. If you can insert, use or create a piece of gaming artwork, incorporating the NAG logo, you might also end up here for your three lines of fame.



Kevin Smith: "My precious... If there were something like lord of the NAG, this would be the front cover; this picture merely explains my obsession with NAG, and the great powers lying within the magazine. I made and rendered this picture with Photoshop CS4."

try to run the game but nothing happens. I start up my internet connection again and try to run the game from Steam and it says updating. Obviously I don't want to update I just want to run the game but it's still stopping the update. So when I try to launch the game it has an update screen which says that it's going to take 4 hours before I can play the game. Now I'm about to flip. After about 5 hours and 450MB later the run game option appears. So I paid R400 at CNA for the game plus another R85 for the data bundle. I enjoyed the game for a week so far but yesterday I got another update request. I can't play the game now until I update the 'Last Stand' patch – which is approx. 370MB. This is not anti-piracy, it's abuse. And why must it be mandatory to update. That's another R72. So now I've paid R557 for this game. And guess what – I don't have enough on my contract data bundle so I have to wait till the 1st of next month to play this game. I'm a casual gamer and I enjoy playing games but Steam is killing the fun of gaming not to mention my budget."

Thanks for adding up all the real numbers involved. It's good that other people can see what all the fuss is about. Steam is great if you have unlimited bandwidth, but not so good if you don't. Ed.

On The Forums

QUESTION: What game was the biggest surprise for you this year?

Cleric: "Definitely Batman: AA. It's the one big release that I didn't pre-order, and it's easily my Game Of The Year (TM). Oh, and that Brütal Legend is not that great."

Azraphael: "For me it was definitely Borderlands. It may have a few bugs but none that have made the game any less enjoyable. Having said that though, I haven't gotten my greasy little paws on MW2 or Forza 3. Yet."

covle_stalker: "The lack of dedicated servers and modding tools in Modern Warfare 2 and Borderlands is ridiculously addictive."

QQQJCRA: "For me it was that MW2 would have no dedicated servers and that AC2 PC is delayed to next year. And Batman: AA is awesome."

Graal: "The Sims 3. I used to hate The Sims, until now."

Incognito: "I could say Batman Arkham Asylum or Modern Warfare 2. BUT we all knew they were going to be great. If ever there was a game this year that gave me a 256-bit b**** slap, it would have to be Borderlands. I really thought this would have been 'another FPS but with lots and lots of guns'. Boy was I wrong :P. Has my vote for game of 2009. Nuff' said."

Mikit0707: "The Secret of Monkey Island: Special Edition. So did NOT see it coming and it was made of pure win. Nostalgia, more nostalgia and three-headed monkeys. Awesome."

Darkmag: "StarCraft 2 has no LAN!"

ShellShok: "That I wouldn't have the cash for all the games I want [sarcasm]."

Tieron: "I'd have to say Need for Speed: SHIFT. Very seldom has a franchise (especially one as big as this) done a complete reboot and emerged out of it fresh, sharp and really successful!"

pArkEr: "Batman: Arkham Asylum. Until I read a few previews I thought it was just another quick movie-cash in. How wrong I was. This game could easily be a standalone and match up to the best games of this generation."

Darkon5524: "Operation Flashpoint: Dragon Rising - Was a fun game to play, but did not come close to the first one."

CaViE: "Prototype. BECAUSE I hated it for everything that it was, until I actually picked it up and played it. Eh."

Ravenworth: "ODST. The long wait that was so unrewarding in the end :("

FENIX: "MW: 2, I honestly never saw Infinity Ward removing dedicated servers. Whether it was for money-making or an 'easier gaming experience, I feel they have made a huge mistake."

DigiBanks99: "Definitely Batman: Arkham Asylum. Who would have thought hanging baddies from gargoyles could be this addictive?"

echo: "Also Borderlands. Mostly thanks to rAge for making me fall in love with it."

Xcaliber: "No Eskom black outs."

Nferno: "Max Payne 3 - My toes tingled when I read about it."

Fredder: "Very impressed with Batman: AA, even if it is only based on game footage and not actual game-play. Oh and their anti-pirate glitch, sheer brilliance..."

Have your say on the NAG forums: forums.tidemedia.co.za/nag/



Goodbye N-Gage

Nokia replaces gaming platform with new online store

NOKIA'S N-GAGE TECHNOLOGY HAS had a bumpy road. What began as a dedicated hardware system, eventually ended up as a software platform that the majority of mid- and high-end Nokia phones are capable of running, and now, N-Gage is being laid to rest, to be replaced by Nokia's Ovi platform. Nokia will continue to ship mobile phones with the N-Gage software preinstalled for a little while, but all N-Gage support will be discontinued before the end of 2010. All N-Gage software will continue to operate after that point, but community features will be disabled from then.

So, what's Ovi, and why is it a worthy successor to N-Gage? Ovi acts as a single, all-in-one marketplace for all of Nokia's Internet services, including maps, games, applications and audio. It was introduced to the public in 2007, and

has enjoyed steady progress in the last couple of years. Unfortunately, it can't yet compete with N-Gage's community offerings, such as friends lists and chat, but, according to the Nokia blog, support for such features is on its way. If you're wondering what exactly the problem was with N-Gage, especially in its current form as a powerful, accessible software platform, the answer from Nokia might help:

"As mobile gaming evolves and begins to encompass social gaming, we want to offer one store front with an even broader portfolio of games – games for everyone. It's much more convenient to have one place to get all your mobile games, and this is what Ovi Store provides."

If you'd like to see what Ovi has on offer for your mobile, visit store.ovi.com/ games.

NOT TAPPED OUT JUST YET

The trading card version of *Magic: The Gathering* might be losing support following a recent overhaul of the rules, but that hasn't stopped publishers Wizards of the Coast from bringing forth yet another attempt at a computerised take on the game. This time, they're teaming up with Sony Online Entertainment to create *Magic: The Gathering Tactics*, which, as the name may imply, is a turn-based strategy game based on characters, lands, spells and creatures from the card game. SOE has had some experience in this industry before, albeit on the other side of the equation, with the creation of collectable card game-based versions of *EverQuest* and *Star Wars Galaxies*. Details are pretty scarce at the moment, but we do know that there will be a single player story mode, online competitive play and a ranking system. *Tactics* should hit stores early 2010 for PC, with a PS3 version to follow soon after. Both platforms will be interconnected for total cross-platform gameplay.

"One producer I'm working with at the moment likens what we're doing to working in Hollywood circa 1920, when everyone was still working out what you could do with this wild, new medium called film; the only difference is that the rate of evolution in technique for video games is running at about a dozen times the speed it ever did for film. The field is open, the potential huge and, in story terms, only just beginning to be properly tapped."

Resident Evil: Wiiro

Resident Evil Zero, for the Nintendo Gamecube, was a graphical masterpiece in its time. It managed to squeeze every last ounce of power out of the console, and now it's ready to do it all again on the Wii. Unfortunately, few details exist even this close to release (which is slated for the 1st of December), but we do know that the game will be updated with motion controls and "other features".

If you're not familiar with *Resident Evil*, it's an important part of the series for a number of reasons. It is the last of the series to use the original gameplay system, before *RE4* came along, and is the only game in the series in which you can switch between the game's two main characters (Rebecca Chambers, STARS Bravo team medic and escaped convict, Billy Coen) at will, in order to solve many of the game's puzzles. It also provides some much-needed background to the *RE* storyline, which put this game right at the top of any series fan's holiday wishlist.



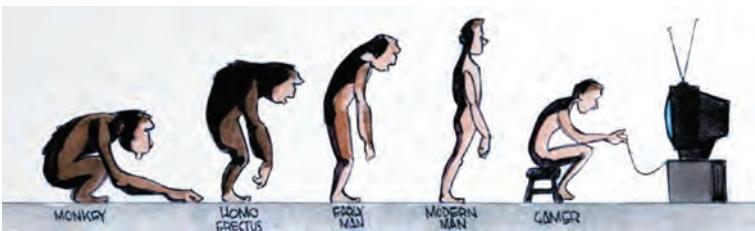
EA hooks new talent

Top British Author, Richard K. Morgan, has signed up with EA to oversee the stories of three new games. The award-winning author of *Altered Carbon* (winner of a Philip K. Dick Award) and *Black Man* (Arthur C. Clarke Award), explains why he's so happy about the deal:

"Video-gaming is the only thing in my life that I would fully qualify as an addiction. I like a fairly limited number of games (there's an awful lot of dross out there), but those I like, I really like, and will play them until the game paths, enemy spawning points and scripted incidentals are graven into my synapses."

"One producer I'm working with at the moment likens what we're doing to working in Hollywood circa 1920, when everyone was still working out what you could do with this wild, new medium called film; the only difference is that the rate of evolution in technique for video games is running at about a dozen times the speed it ever did for film. The field is open, the potential huge and, in story terms, only just beginning to be properly tapped."

"For a writer, that's a pretty close definition of paradise," he concluded.



Stage an intervention

There's no denying that Britain's got talent, but recently it's come to their attention that they've got a couple of problems as, in particular, videogame addiction. A drug, alcohol and gambling rehabilitation centre in the resort town of Weston-super-mare, England, known as Broadway Lodge, has recently added videogame addiction to its list of treatable illnesses. Addicts are put through a 12-step abstinence programme in which they're treated with group therapy, videos and "therapeutic tasks including vacuuming and washing up." They recently treated a 23-year-old Internet gaming addict who was playing games for up to eight hours in a single session, until his parents kicked him off so they could get some time with *FarmVille*.

Brian Dudley, the chap in charge, explains how they took care of that little problem, and got themselves a free domestic worker for the duration of the lad's visit. "We developed a treatment for him which followed the 12-step abstinence approach, but you can't tell someone never to use the internet again," Dudley said. "So we go through all the issues surrounding gaming use and ensure there are triggers through which an addict recognises their usage has become a problem."



The fun never ends

Funcom isn't the only developer that's going out of its way to bring in the hordes from more popular MMORPGs like *World of Warcraft*, and more recently, *Aion*. EA Mythic has now joined in the fray with an interesting new approach to trial subscriptions. Instead of trying to rope in the newbies with 10-day trial accounts, *Warhammer Online* will now allow you to play for as long as you want, with any of the 24 character classes, up to a limit of level 10. In addition, the new game client has been cut down to a much more manageable 1GB download that streams the rest of the game world as you travel through it – which makes perfect sense considering trial players will only have access to the Tier 1 areas anyway. The only other restrictions in place are minor trading limitations (trial players can only buy from the auction house and receive mail, not sell or send), and players can only play on certain designated servers. Everything else is fair game, including Tier 1 PVP battles. If you're interested in joining the WAR, head over to www.warhameronline.com/trial. At the moment, the trial seems to be limited to USA servers only.

THE CALL CONTINUES

It shouldn't really surprise you, but we figured this is the best place for you to hear about this: next year will see a new *Guitar Hero* (at least one, but likely more) and a new *Call of Duty* title hit the shelves. Oh, and *Spider-Man*, if that still means anything these days. All of this was confirmed by Activision during a recent earnings Q&A. Next year is Treyarch's turn to add to the *Call of Duty* pile, and rumours have already surfaced that the game is, once again, going to break out of the WWII mould, but possibly not for good.

ULTIMATELY COLLECTABLE

God of War III will be hitting the shelves in March, and it's a big deal. And big-deal games need big-deal collector's editions, right? *GoW III*'s "Ultimate Edition" will include just three physical objects, with the rest of your hard-earned cash providing you with tons of downloadable content. The star attraction is the 8.3" wide x 10.5" long x 5.9" tall "High-End Sculpted Replica of Pandora's Box," as well as an artwork book. Downloadable content includes the God of War Combat Arena, which contains an exclusive environment and seven challenges, a custom Kratos skin, a documentary depicting the history of *God of War*, the full soundtrack from all three major *GoW* releases, and the *God of War: Blood and Metal EP*, which is a heavy metal homage filled with original music.

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Size matters

DESPITE RELEASING THE LATEST version of the DS (in the form of the DSi, which we're still waiting for, around these parts) one year ago, Nintendo is already preparing to launch a revised version. No, this version won't have better graphics, or more buttons, or a higher resolution camera; it's simply going to be bigger. Quite a bit bigger, actually, and heavier, too. The DSi XL will measure 161 x 91.4 x 21.2mm, and will weigh in at 314g, making it close to the biggest, and the heaviest, DS yet, at just over 60% larger and 40% heavier than the regular DSi. To put it into perspective, the original DS measured 148.7 x 84.7 x 28.9mm and weighed 300g. For the trouble of lugging this device around, however, your DSi XL will have a screen size of 1" larger than the regular DSi, a much larger stylus, and dramatically improved viewing angles.

That's the key element behind this new model, which Nintendo plans to sell alongside the DSi for the foreseeable



future: a wider viewing angle means other people can sit with the player and get in on the action, as well. The company is using this as a method to backtrack somewhat from their "more DSes per household" marketing concept to one which encourages the whole family to gather round a single DSi XL like they would a regular, non-mobile console. Whether or not the XL will be a success is tough to say; we rather thought that the regular DSi was spot-on in terms of delivering what mobile gamers want. The XL will launch in Western territories during Q1 next year, when we'll see it on our sunny shores is anyone's guess.



QuakeLive: local is lekker

Okay, we'll admit it: *QuakeLive* didn't exactly blow us away. While we found the concept to be solid, and the game on which it is based to be, well, timeless, the biggest problem wasn't with the game itself, but rather with our location, and the utterly painful lag this brought with it. It's now been brought to our attention, by a local forum member (thanks Boggle24), that ISP Internet Solutions has launched their very own, local *QuakeLive* servers. You can find them listed in the official server listing when you search for a game. Our experience with these servers has been most positive so far, with pings around the expected sub-50 level. If you haven't heard of *QuakeLive*, or have simply been ignoring it all this time, head over to www.quakelive.com, download the tiny client and fire away. The game runs an updated version of *Quake III Arena* directly in your browser; it simply downloads the levels and other assets as necessary.

STAGE 1 JUNGLE

The ridiculous and undeniably dead-average videogame spoof *Matt Hazard* might not have topped the charts, but that hasn't stopped developers D3 from churning out a sequel. Here to poke fun at the side-scrolling genre is *Blood, Bath and Beyond*, a classic, cheesy, not-terribly-impressive-looking 2.5D side-scrolling shooter that's sure to extract at least a couple of chuckles from even the most hardened gaming veteran. Players can choose between three difficulty levels, "Wussy Mode," "Damn This is Hard," and "F*ck This Sh*," in which the player dies instantly if he's hit a single time. If that doesn't conjure up a few cringes, then your gaming history is sorely missing out on *Contra*. *Blood, Bath and Beyond* should be available soon (if not already) on XBLA and PSN.

FEEL MY RAGE!

id's John Carmack is glad that Infinity Ward is taking the plunge into the realm of no dedicated servers; he needs someone else to test the waters. From a recent interview, Carmack divulged that id's upcoming post-apocalyptic shooter, *Rage*, will most likely rely only on matchmaking for all its multiplayer needs. "It's not cast in stone yet, but at this point no, we don't think we will have dedicated servers," he said, "[But I'm glad] we won't have to be a pioneer on that. We'll see how it works out for everyone else."



Mega multi-platform

John Carmack wants to do... something with *Rage* on the iPhone, he just doesn't know what, specifically.

"I want to work on a *Rage*-themed game to coincide with *Rage*'s release [on PC, Mac and console], but we don't have a firm direction or team chosen for it," Carmack wrote in his release notes for *Doom Classic*, which launched recently. "I was very excited about doing a really-designed-for-the-iPhone first person shooter, but at this point I am positive that I don't have the time available for it."

He's not ready to give up on the iPhone just yet, however, and currently has two people working with the platform on a dedicated basis, although the designer doubts that he'll get a chance to get his own hands dirty any time soon. The next time he expects that to happen will likely be when he's working on the touch interface for the upcoming *Quake Classic*.

Carmack continued, "I also very much want to make at least a tech demo that can run media created with a version of our idTech 5 megatexture content-creation pipeline. I'm not sure exactly what game I would like to do with it, so it might be a 500MB free gee-whiz app..."

In the meanwhile, you can expect continued updates for *Doom Classic*, as well as more news on the now, officially under-construction *Doom 2 RPG*.

He started it

Valve has been taking a bit of flak lately with regards to their "monopolistic" marketing strategies for Steam, their digital distribution service. Adding to the fires are competitors Direct2Drive and Impulse, who've recently decided not to sell *Modern Warfare 2*. D2D is leading the assault, claiming that they "don't believe games should force the user to install a Trojan horse." The horse, in this case, is Steam. Their reasoning is sound: if a user buys the game, then has to install Steam, that's one potential future customer that now has a new place to shop. Of course, refusing to sell the game altogether only makes matters worse, as customers wishing to buy the game online will seek out the only other online store that sells the game - Steam. It's a vicious circle, one that can only really end in one of two ways: either D2D extends their distribution rights to exclude Steam from the game, or they accept the facts and just sell it as-is.



They said it...

"Once this is done, maybe we'll see about doing something new. **If we do want to do something else, then we will do it.** We don't feel tied to making *Call of Duty* games."

Robert Bowling, Infinity Ward
Creative Strategist

"Michael [Pachter] continues to be the only one who believes this is going to happen. **I don't know how forcefully we can say that there is no Wii HD.**"

Reggie Fils-Aime, President of
Nintendo of America

"Valve think their own stuff is the only stuff that matters, to the point where they have their own distribution platform. It's like, 'I don't care about retail, about Marketplace, or PSN, I'm going to have Steam.'"

Randy Pitchford, Gearbox Software
CEO

"Let me give you a scenario that could happen in the next three-to-five years: Games aren't at GBP 50 – they're at GBP 20-30, but they're unfinished. **You then have to download future levels or packs to progress through the game,** and within those downloadable packs you also have micro-transactions."

Rod Cousens, Codemasters CEO



Assassin's read

Sometimes it's not enough to simply play a game; you need to really become engrossed in the lore to truly appreciate it. At least, that's how Ubisoft feels, and is unleashing not just a double-, but a triple-whammy on unsuspecting consumers with *Assassin's Creed II*. In addition to the game, they will be releasing a series of short films to boost the game's storyline, entitled *Lineage*, the first of which has already been released. [On the DVD] The series is handled by the visual effects studio behind *300* and *Sin City*, so it's looking pretty good. If that's not enough for you, then Ubisoft has also teamed up with book publisher Penguin to release *Assassin's Creed Renaissance*, which should be available by time you read this.

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Won't let you go

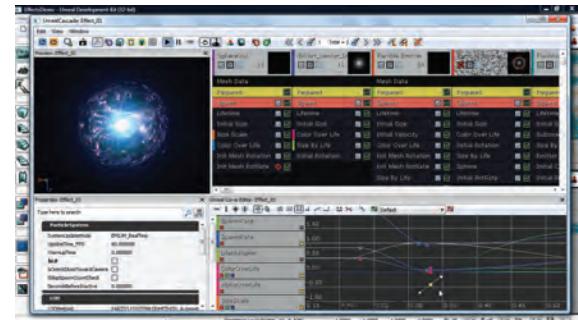
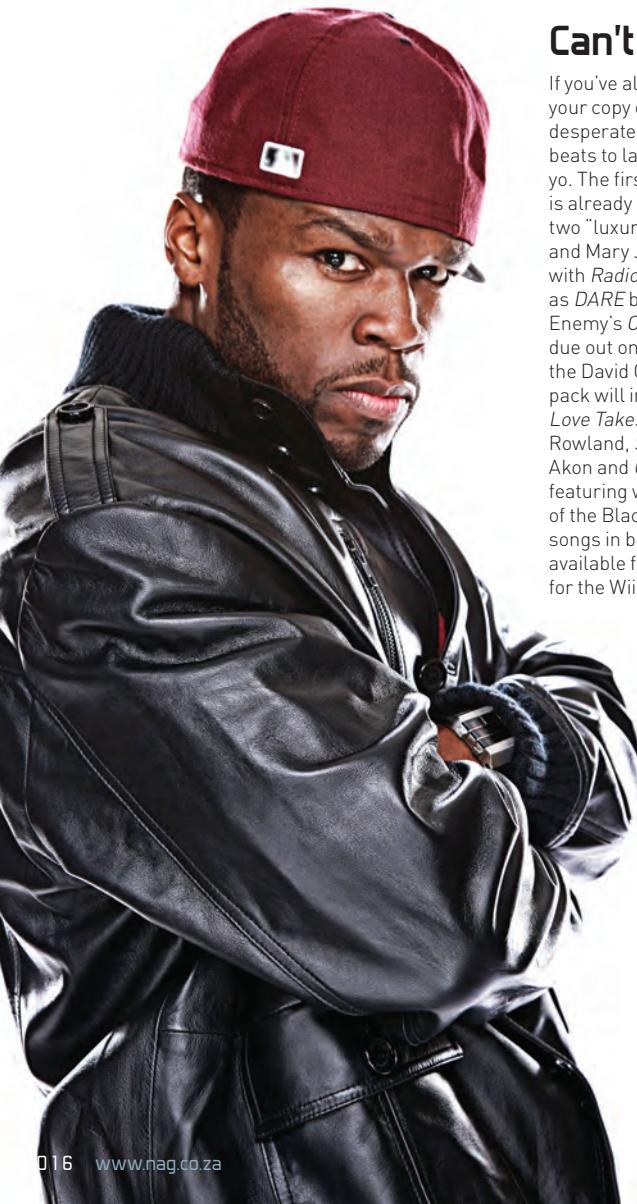
FUNCOM JUST WON'T QUIT, and we admire that about them.

Apparently, recent attempts to bring in newcomers to MMORPG *Age of Conan* have been successful, because now, their focus has shifted over to keeping subscribers, rather than simply getting them on board. Two new schemes have come into fruition. Subscribers who choose to pay their fees in advance now have access to some impressive discounts: paying for 3 months in advance will see the rates reduced by 20% per month, 6 month subscribers receive a 30% discount, and if you pay for an entire year in advance, a rather healthy fee reduction of 45% is coming your way. In addition to the discounts, Funcom is now rewarding players for simply sticking around for a while. Each month, players earn Veteran Points; the amount you earn is based on how long you've been a subscriber, ranging from 6 VP a month for newcomers to 12 VP a month if you've been an active subscriber for longer than 19 months. VP can be traded in for items and other bonuses. Some of these bonuses are a basic horse (3 VP), feat reset potion (2 VP), a 35-slot Veteran's Bag for 8 VP and a Swift Horse for a whopping 85 VP! We saved the best for last, however: for 3 VP, you can increase the size of your character's arms, to make them appear more buff, or – and we're not kidding here – give your character a boob job for an increased, umm... chance of getting a group, we suppose.



Can't touch this

If you've already torn through your copy of *DJ Hero* and now desperately need some more phat beats to lay down, then listen' up, yo. The first DLC pack for *DJ Hero* is already available, and features two "luxury-length" mixes: 50 Cent and Mary J. Blige's *All Of Me* mixed with *Radio Ga Ga* by Queen, as well as *DARE* by the Gorillaz and Public Enemy's *Can't Truss It*. Next up, due out on the 24 of November, is the David Guetta Mix Pack 1. This pack will include remixes of *When Love Takes Over*, featuring Kelly Rowland, *Sexy Chick* featuring Akon and *On The Dancefloor*, featuring will.i.am and apl.de.ap of the Black Eyed Peas. All of the songs in both packs will also be available for individual download for the Wii version of the game.



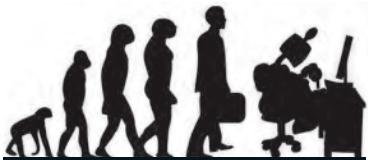
THE REALLY EARLY BIRD...

Thanks to indecisive postal workers and an eager-beaver attitude, copies of *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* started arriving with pre-order customers before the official street date. It seems that The Hut had been advised that a pending postal worker strike at the Royal Mail would mean a slower delivery of the product. Their response: send the games out earlier. However, the strike was called off, meaning that the company unwittingly broke the title's street date.

Unreal offer

If you've ever fancied yourself as a budding game designer, you've probably taken a few moments to poke around the Unreal Editor that's included with almost all Unreal Engine-based games. While the standard editor is great for building new levels, weapons or even characters, it's pretty limited in terms of making a standalone game. Well, this is no longer a concern. Epic Games has now released the full Unreal Development Kit for free, complete with development tools for scripting (using a programming language similar to C++), particles, rendering, AI, physics, animation and more.

This is the same set of tools that colleges around the world, as well as professional development studios, use to develop fully-functional Unreal Engine 3-powered games. The only limitation: this free version is not for commercial use; using it for business purposes brings with it some hefty licensing fees and royalties. If you'd like to download the UDK, head over to www.udk.com. We were "this" close to including it on the cover disc, but unfortunately it arrived just a little bit too late. [Next month, Ed.]



Evolution of TEKKEN



Tekken (1994)



Tekken 2 (1995)



Tekken 3 (1997)



Tekken 4 (2001)



Tekken 5 (2004)



Tekken 6: Bloodline Rebellion (2009)



Who you gonna call?

Hudson Soft is not exactly a company synonymous with developing horror games. Some of their recent releases include *Bomberman Land*, *Mario Party 8* and a collection of puzzle games including *Crossword* and *Sudoku Gridmaster*.

It's understandable, then, that you'd be surprised to learn that they will be one of the few developers daring enough to develop a horror game for the Wii.

Calling is said to bring the spirit of Japanese horror films to the Wii. The game will see the player take control of multiple characters stuck in a creepy Japanese school while all manner of equally creepy things happen to them. Ghosts will try to attack you, and also call you on your mobile phone (hence the game's name), which will need you to put the Wii remote to your ear as you would a phone. All the while, it'll be up to you to explore the grounds and figure out just what the hell is going on. All of your character's interactions in the game will take place with realistic motion controls.

Calling should be available towards the middle of 2010.



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Rotten tomatoes

SOME PEOPLE HAVE SHORT attention spans, so much so, that sometimes it's impossible for them to sit through an entire film without getting agitated. Perhaps as an admission of some sort, Sony has recently filed a patent that will stop their films from ever being boring again. Interactive films will allow the viewers to, well, interact with the films that they're watching, by performing a variety of actions that won't necessarily upset the progress of the film. An example from the patent reads: "avatars displayed to a user, in

response to user gestures in the real world – e.g. in response to manipulation of a game controller or other such expedient – may toss tomatoes that stick to the actor's face or bounce off the actor's face and roll along a table that appears in the movie or television show." Viewers may be able to take turns, or perform actions simultaneously, to score points during various pre-programmed parts of the film. It all seems a bit too *Mystery Science Theatre* to us, but maybe we're happy enough simply watching our films.



Spector talks about the future

It's going to take a bit (okay, a LOT) of getting used to, but Warren Spector is officially a "Disney boy" for the immediate future. In recent interviews, Spector explained that there are at least two *Epic Mickey* sequels to look forward to.

"I don't do anything that isn't extensible," he told 1up. "And I will certainly feel like that I have not done my job if we can't make other games in this world with these characters. In my head, I've got two more planned." There's nothing solid yet, apparently; "In the business world of reality, those games have not approved, and who knows if we'll ever see them," he said. "I had three games planned for *Deus Ex*, and you see where that got me."

Deus Ex is still on his mind, however; "There were and still are *Deus Ex* stories I would like to tell," Spector said. "That story is not done for me."

While future *Deus Ex* properties are owned by Eidos (Spector has tried, and failed, to purchase them), he nonetheless began work on a project very, very closely-related to the brand, before Disney went and bought out Junction Point. "I sort of filed the serial numbers off," he said. A positive sign, then, that Warren Spector hasn't given up on his history of role-playing shooters just yet.

Quantic Dreams' future with the PS3 Wand

Heavy Rain might miss out on the PS3 Wand, but Quantic Dream founder David Cage says that he's looking forward to using the technology for future, "mature" games.

"We're really interested in this, of course, because we have this close relationship with Sony, but also because we've had a chance to play with some prototypes and it's really promising and interesting," Cage explained during Eurogamer Expo 2009. "We think about movement and how it can reinforce immersion even since *Fahrenheit*. We use the controller in a certain way in *Heavy Rain*... Trying really to emulate what your character does on screen, trying to make you feel like you are doing the movement. So we are very close to this way of thinking."

"We would be interested to discover whether there is a way to use this device for more mature audience and for a more mature experience," he added. "But yeah, this is definitely something we are going to explore in the future."

Thankfully, Cage explains that not every game should be



motion-controlled. "Some games," he said, "you want to play just, you know, sitting on a couch".

Heavy Rain will be available early next year, and is a PS3 exclusive release.

Gaming Charts



LOOK & LISTEN RECOMMENDS...

PLAYSTATION 3

- 1 Assassin's Creed II
- 2 FIFA 10
- 3 Tekken 6
- 4 Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2
- 5 Uncharted 2: Among Thieves

XBOX 360

- 1 Forza Motorsport 3
- 2 Grand Theft Auto: Episodes From Liberty City
- 3 Halo 3: ODST
- 4 Left 4 Dead 2
- 5 Army of Two: The 40th Day

PLAYSTATION 2

- 1 FIFA 10
- 2 Bakugan
- 3 WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2010
- 4 DJ Hero [Bundle]
- 5 Guitar Hero 5 [Bundle]

PC

- 1 Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2
- 2 The Sims 3: World Adventures Expansion Pack
- 3 Dragon Age: Origins
- 4 CS:15
- 5 Mass Effect 2

PSP

- 1 Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars
- 2 Gran Turismo
- 3 Jak and Daxter: The Lost Frontier
- 4 LittleBigPlanet
- 5 Cars Race-O-Rama

WII

- 1 Wii Fit Plus
- 2 New Super Mario Bros. Wii
- 3 Need for Speed: Nitro
- 4 Rapala: We Fish [Bundle]
- 5 Rabbids Go Home

DS

- 1 Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Winter Games
- 2 Mario & Luigi: Bowser's Inside Story
- 3 Disney Fairies: Tinker Bell and the Lost Treasure
- 4 Mad Karts of Madagascar
- 5 Pokémon Platinum



September 2009 figures provided by GfK
www.gfk.co.za

PLAYSTATION 3

- 1 Need for Speed: Shift
- 2 Batman: Arkham Asylum
- 3 Ashes Cricket 2009
- 4 FIFA 09
- 5 Madden NFL 10

XBOX 360

- 1 Need for Speed: Shift
- 2 Halo 3: ODST
- 3 Batman: Arkham Asylum
- 4 Madden NFL 10
- 5 Gears of War 2

PLAYSTATION 2

- 1 WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2009
- 2 Ben 10: Alien Force
- 3 FIFA 09
- 4 Grand Theft Auto: Vice City
- 5 Need for Speed: Most Wanted

PC

- 1 The Sims 3
- 2 Need for Speed: Shift
- 3 Need for Speed: Underground 2
- 4 Command & Conquer 3: Tiberium Wars
- 5 Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas

PSP

- 1 FIFA 09
- 2 Need for Speed: Shift
- 3 Grand Theft Auto: Vice City
- 4 Burnout Legends
- 5 Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories

WII

- 1 Wii Sports Resort + MotionPlus
- 2 Wii Sports
- 3 Ashes Cricket 2009
- 4 Wii Fit + Balance Board
- 5 Mario Kart Wii + Wheel

DS

- 1 New Super Mario Bros.
- 2 Brain Age 2: More Training in Minutes a Day!
- 3 G-Force
- 4 The Sims 2: Apartment Life
- 5 Mario Kart DS

Pirate marketing

Trials developer RedLynx has admitted to an "if you can't beat them, join them" marketing approach for the game. The company leaked a hacked version of *Trials* onto torrent sites on the same day as it was released for paying customers.

The theory here is that, because the game relies heavily on leader-boards that aren't available in the pirate version, pirates will buy the full version of the game. While the company may be displaying a little too much faith in people, it's an interesting tactic.

"Piracy is here, so how can we take advantage of that? What we did actually, on day one, we put that game immediately on all the torrent networks ourselves," revealed CEO Tero Virtala, during a panel discussion at Develop Liverpool.

"That game relies really heavily on the server side – the leaderboards are the soul of the game. I don't know if it's helped, I'd assume so because even though the version that we put on the torrent networks wasn't the full version, it's the version of the game without the actual soul, without the leaderboards to play against other players."

Apparently, there are 150,000 legitimate copies in the market, all making use of the leader-boards. Also, it appears that the leader-boards haven't been cracked... yet.

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PV13

CONCEPT ART

Fallout Online struggles onward

BETHESDA HAS BEEN ALL over Interplay's back in recent times, over the development of a *Fallout* MMOG. Most recently, Bethesda has filed an injunction against Interplay, claiming that they've breached the contract that gives Interplay the rights to develop and publish *Fallout Online*. Since we've covered this before, we'll cut this long story a bit short; it's the ending we're interested in right now. Interplay has managed to wiggle their way through a few legal loopholes in the contract, and the court has ruled in their favour – granting them continued rights to develop the game with Masthead

Studios. As a show of faith, Interplay's Chris Taylor (one of the lead designers on the original *Fallout* games), released a collection of concept art on the Interplay forums. In addition, reports have surfaced that Interplay has a 600-page design document under their belt, as well as a working prototype that "included a playable portion of the 3D game environment, which was based upon the game design documents and showcased the art style selected by the team." So, it's "very official" this time, and it seems like Bethesda has finally run out of options to knock Interplay off the tracks.



GOOD GAMING

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has pledged more than \$1.85 million in grants to researchers looking into the benefits of video gaming. A wide variety of health issues and the impact that video games could have on them will be investigated.

The Foundation listed a few examples in a statement: "How the popular dance pad videogame *Dance Dance Revolution* might help Parkinson's patients reduce the risk of falling; how *Wii Active* might be most effectively implemented in high schools to help overweight students lose weight; how a mobile phone game with a breath interface might help smokers quit or reduce their tobacco use; or how facial recognition games might be designed to help people with autism learn to identify others' emotions."

We will now wait and see if Nintendo actually announce a game called *Wii Active...* hopefully this is not a case of the blind leading the blind (because gaming can do bugger-all about blindness...)

THE BAGINATOR?

The poor badger has once again been hijacked for a shameless honourable commendable promotion. In this current commercial marketing boredom relief exercise you can win a decent prize. Last issue it was Samsung and now it's Ubisoft and their annoyingly cute Rabbids.

The story goes that the Rabbids found the badger but then got lost in the magazine [hey, this is December, give us a break already]. So now, you need to find all five of them... They look like this:



If you find them all send mail to ed@nag.co.za with the five locations. You can win the following cool stuff from Ubisoft and Megarom.



LAST MONTH'S WINNER

Eswee Engelbrecht, p114



MASS EFFECT 2 COLLECTOR'S EDITION



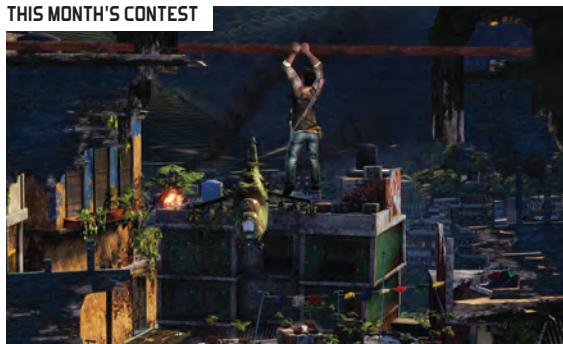
- Dark Horse Comic Issue #1
 - Hardcover Art Book
 - Game
 - Bonus DVD
 - 1 Exclusive In-Game item
 - Cerberus Network Membership

Caption of the Month

Every month we'll choose a screenshot from any random game and write a bad caption for it. Your job is to come up with a better caption. The winner will get a copy of *WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2010* for PS3, sponsored by Ster Kinekor Entertainment. Send your captions to ed@nag.co.za with the subject line [December Caption].



THIS MONTH'S CONTEST



NAG'S LAME ATTEMPT AT HUMOUR:
"Hey! You in the helicopter. A little help here!"

LAST MONTH'S WINNER



"Early testing of the 'Thermite SMG' didn't go according to plan."
- Darren Greybe

PREVIOUS MONTH'S WINNER



"You feeling lucky, pumpkin?"
- Peter Beseky

Events

MAGIC THE GATHERING

NOVA'S FRIDAY NIGHT MAGIC

When: Every Friday
Time: 19:00
Type: Standard, Constructed
Cost: R30
novvagaming.co.za

LANS

PITCH BLACK LAN 300 TEAMS

When: 4 Dec
Where: Pretoria
langames.co.za

GAMEON LAN PARTY

When: 4 Dec
Where: Durban
langames.co.za

TAYLORMADE LANNING

When: 4 Dec
Where: Cape Town
langames.co.za

NOVA LAN

When: 5 Dec
Where: Novva Gaming, JHB
novvagaming.co.za

MAYHEM CHRISTMAS

When: 5 Dec
Where: Boksburg
langames.co.za

MAYHEM DEC

When: 6 Dec
Where: Boksburg
langames.co.za

FRAG LAN SHOWCASE 1000

When: 11 Dec
Where: Durban
langames.co.za

YU-GI-OH!

Tournaments
When: Saturdays
Time: 10:00
Where: Novva Gaming, JHB
novvagaming.co.za



Release List

Release dates subject to change

WEEK 1: DECEMBER

TITLE	PLATFORMS
James Cameron's Avatar: The Game	PSP, DS, Wii, PS3, 360, PC
Saw	PS3, 360, PC
Tekken 6	PSP
Your Shape	Wii
SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs Fireteam Bravo 3	PSP
Buzz! Quiz World	PSP, PS3
Colin McRae: DiRT 2	PC
The Saboteur	PS3, 360, PC

Tekken 6



Keeping up with the Joneses

Nintendo's statements around the time that they were planning to launch the Wii have been thrown out of the window by the company. Back then, they didn't think that HD was 'all that.' Now the Japanese gaming giant is singing another tune.

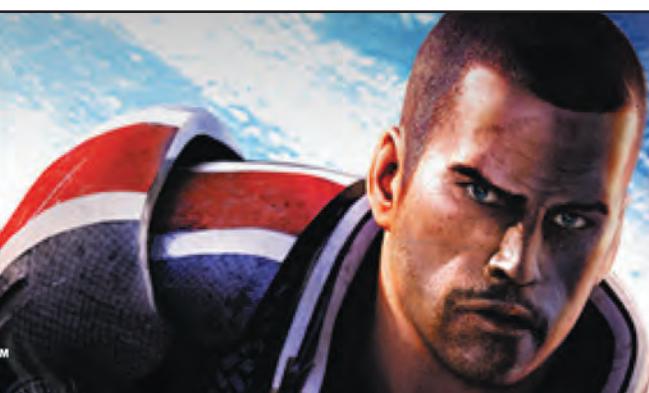
"Since our division has been reviewing and developing a number of hardware, we are looking into many different things, including HD and SD," Genyo Takeda, Nintendo's R&D division's GM told investors recently.

"Since an increasing number of the TV sets at home around the world are becoming HD today, it will be natural for a machine to be able to generate graphics that people will be accustomed to see on HD televisions. Since the ordinary TV programs are now shifting to HD, moving to HD appears to me a natural flow."

"We are not too much concerned about if the technology itself is state-of-the-art or rather old-fashioned. If we can find the most appropriate medium, between SD and HD, and flexibly move around them depending on the game's contents, it will be good I think."

"We probably cannot swim against the tide," said legendary game developer Shigeru Miyamoto. "The customers' tastes will become more and more refined. Even today, many customers who have seen HD once say they cannot go back to SD." Thanks for stating the obvious, Mr Miyamoto...

MASS EFFECT 2
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MIKTARS ACHTERBANGS

BY MIKTAR DRACON

M for Mature

THE GAMING INDUSTRY IS going to have to mature, and I don't mean adding more blood and boobs into games [*What! Take that back, Ed!*]. It's going to have to grow up, and stop thinking it can charge ridiculous prices for games – as if all games were created equal. The gaming industry – that is, the big-business side of things – is going to have to realise consumers aren't as dumb as they think they are.

Look at DVD when it first hit the market. All movies were the same price, and priced too high. That changed quickly. Within less than a year, movies started being moved into reasonable price brackets according to the quality, budget and appeal. Cheap horror flicks went cheap. The hottest new blockbuster gradually found its way into a price bracket consumers approved of. Sales went up, consumers bought more, and the DVD market boomed so fast that even South Africa's head spun. When Blu-ray hit the market (at least here in the US), it was the same thing. All movies were \$40, and the sales were abysmal. Within a few months, the movie baseline became \$30, with cheap up-scaled reprints at \$20 or \$15.

And then there are games. These damn things are being sold in the US for \$60. No matter if it's some cheap, crappy third-rate production (*X-Blades*, *Wheelman*, etc), or the hottest new triple-A 'Call of Duty World Craft Guitar Hero Band'. Sixty bucks is a little like R600, for the sake of argument.

We don't stand for it with movies. No sir, we don't stand for it. But with games, well. Our wallets keep voting for our addiction, because we're damn addicted. And that's why even Wii games go for \$60. Except *Wii Fit Plus* – that's \$20. Like an experiment, methinks, because it's more of an iterative upgrade.

Eventually, Activision, EA, Ubisoft and all those other big-business types who keep raising the prices of games, slapping on useless 'next-gen tax', and spending \$40 million creating games only worth two million, are going to wonder why consumers are so interested in the second-hand market. Or piracy, as it's known in South Africa. That was sarcasm. In the States, second-hand games at GameStop go for \$20 to \$30 bucks, and the second-hand resale market is huge. People go to GameStop, buy the games, finish them, get their gamerscore, and then want something else. So they go trade it in for \$30 store credit, and pick up a second-hand game or just pay half price for a new title. R300 for a new, second-hand, hot-topic rocking game, instead of R600? It's obvious what people prefer.

And big business wants to kill the second-hand industry. It hates it; it hates so much, my precious. It wants every game to sell for R600, and nobody should be able to resell it. Ridiculous, isn't it?

Digital distribution is making some inroads here: Impulse from Stardock lets you sell back your digital copy, and you get some credit back towards other purchases on the service. Steam has awesome sales, slashing game prices by insane amounts. But digital is expensive in South Africa because Internet Sucks Donkey Balls. Right?

So that doesn't count for South Africans. Nope. Activision

raises the 'PC price' of *Call of Duty: MW 2* to R600 instead of letting it sell at the respectable price of R300; all because they know – they said so – that it's "hot property and people will pay more for it."

We let the 'R600-thing' on Xbox and PS3 games slide, because we know that console games have royalties that need to be paid. That's the terms MS and Sony set for their consoles: if you want our huge user base and you want huge sales, you're gonna pay royalties on each disc we print. We don't let you print your own, and that's why games are R600. But on PC, anyone can use a cheap Chinese manufacturer and print DVDs – that's why games can be R300 or even R199 if the publisher is willing to be reasonable.

But *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* for PC for R600? Signs and portents of a future where 'Big Business Games Industry' wants to be greedy beyond reasonable corporate greed. And that can't last forever, because that's what caused such a huge piracy situation in South Africa in the first place. Remember the 'gaming crash' of 1999?

Hollywood, as a mature industry, knows how to charge for content based on the cost of that content. And even then, they still overcharge. But they're far more reasonable than the gaming industry, which is still a fat, greedy little child looking only at short-term gain. So, a few fat cats high up the chain can get rich quickly, then duck out as their stocks crumble to the ground, and you end up with companies like EA going from biggest super publisher to huge losses.

Okay, to be fair here, EA ain't as damaged as one would think. To quote Tycho Brae from Penny Arcade: "When Activision left *Brütal Legend* to twist in the wind, it seemed like just the latest act of villainy from the industry's new Baphomet, now that Electronic Arts [a company with a market capitalisation of \$6.7 billion] has been reconfigured as the scrappy rebel". **NAG**

"Activision raises the 'PC price' of *Call of Duty: MW 2* to R600 instead of letting it sell at the respectable price of R300; all because they know – they said so – that it's "hot property and people will pay more for it."

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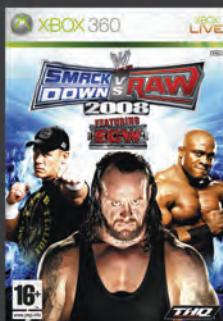
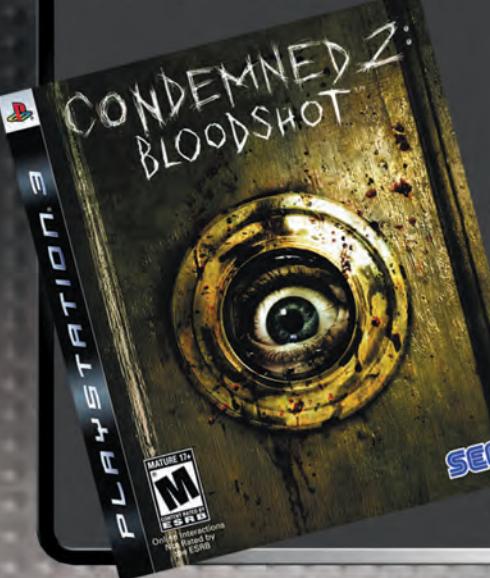


RULES: Entries close on 31 January 2010. The judges' decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into. The prize is not transferable and may not be converted into cash.
Your entry SMS constitutes your acceptance of these rules. Winners will be notified telephonically by 15 February 2010.
Prize to be redeemed in either Johannesburg, Cape Town or Durban. Winner to arrange own transport.

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BY MIKLÓS SZECSEI

2009: A Forced Retrospect

MAN, WHAT A YEAR 2009 has been. Ten bucks says 2010 will rock even more, though. All right, hang on; let's stop there. Does anybody else suffer from this mindset? This unremitting anticipation for the next game or piece of hardware that is just poking its lofty allure above the horizon? I'm already foaming at the mouth for the glut of titles that 2010 will bring. I think that this perpetual desire for new titles annoys me. Let's find a suitable scapegoat, so we can feel better about this problem. Let's blame capitalism! Yes, capitalism, while you may have moulded the gaming industry into what it is today, you've also created a generation of insatiable gamers who constantly crave the next title like a Jet addict craves the next hit – or something to that effect.

Where to start? Well, Julie Andrews once sang, "at the very beginning" – but I'd prefer to start somewhere more recent: *Uncharted 2*. If ever there were a PlayStation 3 exclusive that warranted dropping wads of cash on gaming hardware, it's this one. For the week it took me to run, gun and swing my way through this title, my significant other and I sat enraptured by how completely polished and undeniably fantastic this game is. If you are at a loss for what to ask Father Christmas to stuff into your stockings this year, a PlayStation 3 (assuming you don't already have one) and a copy of *Uncharted 2* are a sure-fire hit. And then, you'll have a PlayStation 3 for next year when *God of War III* arrives. Ah, damn it! Again with this whole perpetual anticipation thing. Oh well, no sense in dwelling on it. Let's move on.

LucasArts apparently had shady people sitting outside my window, eavesdropping on my bedtime prayers, because they answered them and remade *The Secret of Monkey Island*. I absolutely adore the *Monkey Island* series; and getting a remake of the first computer game I ever bought when I was young, was a shining highlight for me this year. I rode a wave of grog and nostalgia on a giant ear bud and loved every second of it. Now I'm holding thumbs for them to remake *LeChu*. Ugh! I'll get this right eventually, I promise.

Something gloriously refreshing happened between this and my previous column: Tim Schafer unleashed *Brütal Legend* upon the masses – and it was good. Last month I bewailed the lot of gamers who were continuously tasked with saving humanity. Well, that's still your job in *Brütal Legend*, but it's just so much cooler this time around. I mean, seriously: you get to recruit an army of S&M bikini-jungle

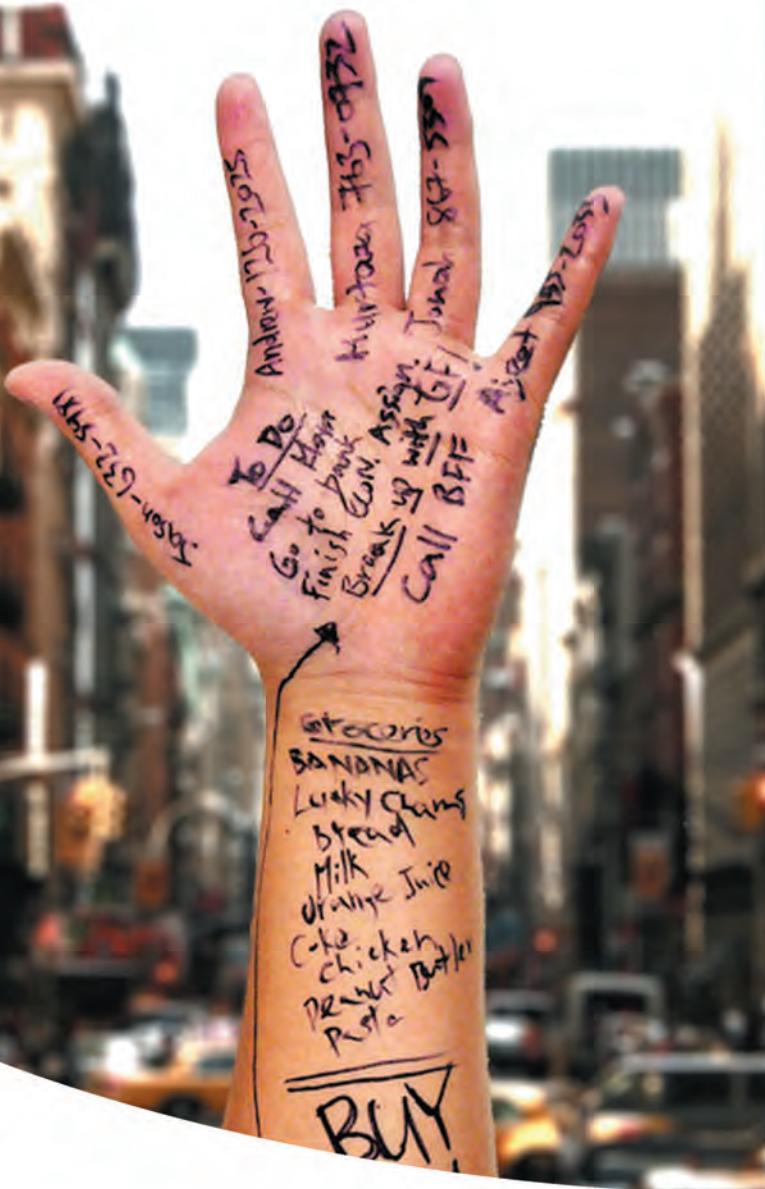
babes who ride on top of giant Gene Simmons monkey-cats, which breathe fire. Legendary! So, despite the fact that you're saving humanity yet again, *Brütal Legend* lets you save it with tongues so deeply squished into cheeks that it looks as if you're trying to swallow a pool cue sideways. Tim Schafer definitely gets a high-five for putting an interesting spin on the bland narrative staple, and for providing me with another highlight for the year... and for making a game that grabbed my attention so forcefully that I was unable to wander off into a daydream of anticipation for something new.

I'm sure many of you have spotted the obvious missing game in this list of highlights: *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2*. Well, there's a good reason for that, actually: the game is not out yet. Of course, by the time you read this we will have all been playing it for a few weeks (NAG's deadlines disrupt space-time continuums; don't try to understand it, I've given up). However, in keeping with the theme of anticipation that has entwined this column so stealthily, I'll say that I'm anticipating the game to be so awesome that it would have wound up in my list of highlights regardless.

I'm not going to say I hope you had a fantastic Christmas, because we all know that this edition hit the shelves way before the 25th anyway. Instead, I shall say that I hope you have a fantastic Christmas that is chock-full of gaming goodies. Don't forget to spend some time with your family in spite of the fact that you will, in all likelihood, have tons of new games to play. **NAG**

Let's blame capitalism! Yes, capitalism, while you may have moulded the gaming industry into what it is today, **you've also created a generation of insatiable gamers who constantly crave the next title like a Jet addict craves the next hit – or something to that effect.**

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HANDS ON

Developer → Vigil Games

Publisher → THQ Web → www.darksiders.com

Release Date → January 2010

Genre → Action Adventure

Platforms → Xbox 360 | PS3

DARK

to him was given a large sword

A FEW MONTHS AGO, WHEN it was first mentioned that we'd need to send someone over to London to preview Joe Mad's latest foray into videogame production, and that I'd be a likely candidate for this honour, I was ecstatic, to say the least. It's not every day that one gets to meet an icon like Joe, or travel to another country to do it. So, after much frustration at the British Visa Application Centre, 21 hours of total flight time, two nights in a hotel, three shaved elbows for standing on the wrong side of the escalator and one day of pure awesome, here we are...

If you follow the comic book industry in any way, there's a pretty good chance that you know who Joe Madureira is. If not, here is a brief - and assuredly necessary - bit of trivia for you to soak up: Joe Mad (as people who can't pronounce or spell his name like to call him) is a comic book artist and writer behind *Uncanny X-Men*, *Ultimates 3*, and his own creation, *Battlechasers*. He's an important person to be aware of, not only because of his incredible artistic style and engaging stories, but because he's a massive gaming nerd, as well. So: comic book artist/writer plus seasoned gamer; that means you should pay attention to his latest exploration into the world of game development. THQ certainly has.

Darksiders' story and setting take their cues from the Bible's *Book of Revelation* (often referred to as *The Apocalypse of John*). While there are surprisingly few specifics mentioned about the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, a huge mythology has sprung up around them over the years. From religious artists of the Middle Ages to modern writers like Terry Pratchett, it seems like everyone has an idea on what exactly this troupe of 'end-bringers' is meant to do in their

spare time. Thankfully, it means that the subject matter is pretty open-ended, and, while we rather doubt that St. John envisioned War having a chat with 20-storey-tall demon gates and throwing derelict vehicles at nearby packs of crows, we hope that the massive amount of wiggle room the creators have here is appreciated by everyone who plays the game when it arrives next year.

The game kicks off in the middle of the Apocalypse. Fire is raining down from the skies, while angels and demons fight it out in a battle that destroys the human race and decimates the surface of the Earth – except, none of that was meant to happen. As it's the job of the Four Horsemen to ride forth to declare the end of the world, while a lamb opens the seven seals and all that stuff, everyone thinks that War has made a boo-boo of cataclysmic proportions and set his riding forth alarm a bit too early. With none of the other Horsemen around to back him up, however, the battle rages on and War soon finds himself the infernal slammer. After a hundred years, he awakens and pleads for a chance of redemption, and is granted it. War has one chance to return to the ruins of Earth, prove his innocence, and re-unite the Horsemen. Along the way, he discovers a massive conspiracy between Heaven and Hell, one that requires loads and loads of bloodshed to solve.

War's attempt at redemption is not without its cost, however. He is stripped of almost all of his powers and shackled to a prison warden known as The Watcher. This sadistic entity is there to ensure that our equestrian hero doesn't step out of line on his quest, and provides a sharp balance between assistance and interference. In short, he's an ass, but War's stuck with him for the foreseeable future.

DARKSIDERS™

The Dark Rider was the embodiment of War, and his horse... was Ruin

When War returns to Earth, he finds the entire planet devoid of human life. Hideously mutated creatures run amok throughout the streets, crumbling buildings topple under their own weight, meteors crash down to the Earth's surface and gaggles of angels fly around in search of demons to battle with.

Despite his absence, the war between Heaven and Hell is still very much alive on Earth. To reclaim his innocence, and return the world to order (The Horsemen are, generally, a pretty orderly bunch), War is forced to turn to a number of unlikely allies, many of which will team up with our hero for a period of time to unlock new areas for exploration, or even trade a few souls for improved weaponry.

Describing *Darksiders*' gameplay is a bit of a feat, since it draws from so many sources of inspiration. The bulk of the game involves combat, in which War can perform combination attacks, use active (or "Wrath") abilities, and put the destructible environment around him to use however he sees fit. The developers even go as far as to claim "if you can pick it up, you can kill with it," which suddenly dawns on us as a feature severely lacking in games these days. When not introducing the locals to his giant sword, Chaoeater, War will also spend a lot of his time exploring the game world. With level-traversal abilities to rival the likes of Lara Croft, War can climb, swim, swing along certain surfaces, and later float; and even ride his great felsteed, Ruin. If you can picture a combination of *God of War*, *Devil May Cry*, and *Legacy of Kain*, you're on the right track to understanding the combat in *Darksiders*. The game world itself seems equally affected with multiple personality disorder; it's a mix of linear and non-linear story progression, and uses a hub-and-spokes system for questing. Some quests will send you down a very direct, action-packed pathway of destruction, whereas others can be explored at your leisure. There are also plenty of instances where access to certain quests requires a particular item, which is commonly found in games like *Metroid* and *Castlevania* (and, like, a billion others). Not to be outweighed by the combat and exploration, *Darksiders* also features what the developers like to call an "RPG lite" character system, which allows you to purchase weapon and ability upgrades, unlock new combos and attacks, and the like. Say hello to *Fable*, Mr List of Influences. Despite all of its influences, the developers have likened *Darksiders* to one game above all: *Zelda*.

Throughout War's travels, he will gather the currency of the Underworld: souls. Three soul types exist: green, which replenishes War's health; blue, which the sinister demon Vulgrim accepts in exchange for his wares; and yellow, which War needs to activate his Wrath abilities. Your method for collecting souls is quite simple: kill things.



War

The protagonist, War has come to Earth to proclaim his innocence and kill lots of things in the process. He rides on his horse, Ruin, and wields Chaoeater, a massive sword. War is voiced by Liam O'Brien, the voice talent behind many anime titles including *Afro Samurai*, *Naruto* and *Ergo Proxy*, as well as many other videogames.

Different enemies drop different souls (or combinations of souls; apparently there's no one-per-customer rule around here), but by using special finishing moves on an enemy, War can coerce them to drop souls they wouldn't usually drop. What this boils down to is a system of combat that encourages you to think, instead of simply mashing buttons. If you're low on health, you'll want to perform plenty of choking/slamming/throwing attacks to extract as many green souls as possible, but then you miss out on the blue stuff that Vulgrim so enjoys.

Balance is a key element.

War is a versatile fellow, as is clearly evident by the range of weapons and abilities at his disposal. As you progress through the game, you'll unlock a wide variety of the stuff, as well as a number of artefacts to customise your skills and weapons. Items, such as weapons or consumables, can be accessed in mid-combat through the D-pad, which means each player will be able to create a load-out of sorts to meet their particular style of combat. For example, War's pistol, Mercy, can be put to use to take care of ranged



The Watcher

Woiced by Mark Hamill, The Watcher has been bound to War to keep him in line, and isn't afraid to raise his ethereal hand to help remind him of that. Since he's always around (at the press of a button, at least), The Watcher finds himself stuck in the role of guide, as well as warden.

When War returns to Earth, he finds the entire planet devoid of human life

Samael

Afallen angel that can't seem to get along with anyone. Coincidentally, that makes him a potential ally for War, but Samael's imprisonment in the depths of Hell mean War is going to have to go in and get him if he's to be of any real use.

Vulgrim

The shopkeeper, voiced by Phil LaMarr (Afro Samurai, MGS4, Speed Racer, and many more games, series and movies). Vulgrim knows how to get his scaly, pointy hands on a variety of things that he knows War is in need of. The only things he cares about, however, are souls. If War wants to deal with Vulgrim, he'll have to get his hands dirty.

Abaddon

The leader of the angelic assault during the Apocalypse, Abaddon was slain by the forces of Hell. The memory of him now serves as fuel for vengeance for most of the angels still left on Earth.



foes, and he can hurl devastating attacks at the press of a button. There are plenty of weapons to uncover during your progress through the game world: from giant scythes to massive, yet bizarrely portable cannons, to mini-guns and chains.

As mentioned previously, combat isn't the only thing War will occupy his time with. Exploration, puzzle solving and even a few mini-games will be around every corner, not to mention the gargantuan bosses that require more than just a heavy hand to bring down. During some of the free-roaming "hub" areas, War will often have side-quests that require him to "kill x number of creatures" and the like. Performing these tasks will see War richly rewarded for his troubles.

The majority of the progress through the storyline is, thankfully, handled with linear questing. The developers have strong feelings when it comes to this, and felt that by directing the action themselves, they can deliver a much stronger, more engaging experience.

There are parts of the game where AI-controlled players will team with War. During a demonstration, Joe and Luis (Luis Gigliotti, Creative Director at THQ) showed us a stage where War and The Smith join forces in battle. War and his new ally have a friendly angel-swatting competition for the entire run of the sequence, and there were several instances where the duo returned to areas that War had visited previously, so that The Smith could open up new parts

of the world. Story progress like this is common throughout the game, according to the team. Travelling back and forth within the world will be accomplished through a number of methods. You're already aware of War's horse, Ruin, but there is also a number of teleportation devices throughout the world, called Serpent Holes, which War can use to move quickly between locations.

With only a day to take a peek behind the scenes of *Darksiders*, it's highly likely that we've only seen the tip of the iceberg. The developers said their professional play testers pin the total game time at 25-30 hours, and things look like they just keep getting bigger, nastier and crazier as the game progresses. Heck, the **smallest** boss is four storeys tall. *Darksiders* looks like it'll have something for everyone. The release date is close, and the code that we had a chance to play already seemed pretty much close to finished. Everything just feels... right; the game is fast paced where it needs to be, and pleasantly sedate at other times. Although this is only the company's first title, *Darksiders* shines like the well-polished products of development studios that have been around for a decade.

I'd like to give a special mention to Howard at PlayStation, as well as Emma and Luke at THQ, and of course, Joe and Luis, for taking the time to chat about *Darksiders*. You guys all helped put together this trip and gave us a chance to see what could be one of the biggest games of 2010.

Darksiders' story and setting take their cues from the Bible's Book of Revelation

Interview Joe Madureira

NAG: You've been involved in the creation of the characters, story and environments in *Darksiders*; how involved did you get in the design of the actual gameplay mechanics?

Joe: "I was much more involved in the beginning, when we were just trying to figure out, for example, what kind of moves War is going to have, what weapons he will be able to use, and what kind of abilities he'll be able to use. I would sometimes conceptualise with storyboards, like how certain moves would look – some of them made it in, and some of them didn't. I'm trying to stay more involved in the character side of things, like 'what is this character's attack, and what kind of range he has, and does he have a weapon?' I'm indirectly involved in the game design, but we have such a huge team that's split up between level designers, combat designers and people working on creature behaviour; and, while the leads do report to me, I try to stay out of their way most of the time. Unless something really bugs me, then I'll step in. As the years have gone on, I'm moved into more of a directorial role, and less hands-on. In the beginning, we were so small that everyone had to do everything."

NAG: How big is the team now?

Joe: "We have about 60 people on *Darksiders* at all times, but there are about 130 people in total."

NAG: And the rest are obviously working on your upcoming *Warhammer 40,000*...

MMORPG, which I assume we can't talk about?"

Joe: "Right [laughs]."

NAG: Aside from the obvious Bible influences, which are just a couple of lines, really, what other influences came into effect during the development of *Darksiders*?

Joe: "We wanted the game to have the tone of a cool action film, with lots of cinematic action and destruction, but we didn't want it to get too dark or turn into a horror, so we really tried to keep the creature designs fun. It's always a bit of fun so that no matter how gruesome a demon is, it looks almost like you could be fighting something like Godzilla. We try to keep it fun – not too scary – we really want it to appeal to a lot of gamers, so we stayed away from too many Biblical references."

NAG: Your previous title, *Trade Wars*, had a bit of a bumpy ride. What major lessons did you learn from the development of that game that you're now bringing into the development of *Darksiders*?

Joe: "You learn something from all experiences, whether it's good or bad. Sometimes you learn more from a bad experience. The most important thing about *Trade Wars* is [that] a lot of the relationships that I developed in those years ended up still being useful a few years later. Believe it or not, a lot of the guys that I worked with on *Trade Wars*



We wanted the game to have the tone of a cool action film, with lots of cinematic action and destruction





ended up working with me on *Darksiders*. We always ended up finding each other; we stuck around and we stuck together. It's not that we're doing things that much different than we did then, it's just that now we have a lot more support, and we have our own technology and a much more seasoned team. We're just a lot better than we used to be [laughs]."

elements of it in *Darksiders*. Is this true?

Joe: "Battlechasers #10 in the game... no, I might have said it, but I was probably just being funny; I have a strange sense of humour [laughs]. So, it's not true."

NAG: Will there ever be a *Battlechasers* #10, or are you done with comics?

Joe: "Yeah, I'm done with comics for the time being. The characters are dear to me, and I do get asked about this often; obviously it's touched people's hearts in a way that makes me really want to complete the story some day, and I do think it's something I'll get back to, but I can't say when."

NAG: How long have you been gaming? What platforms did you play on?

Joe: "I've been gaming since I got my Atari 2600, when I was about five years old. Since then I've played on console and PC. I've had a Commodore 64, I had an Amiga 500, I had a Neo Geo cartridge system, and I had an 8-bit Nintendo, a Genesis. Literally everything except for the Jaguar. But I did buy a 3DO; I was the only one with a 3DO in the entire world. I love games. I still have all my old games; I have the original boxes. I love keeping them; it's like a little dusty museum. I even had one of those big arcade cabinets, but I don't have room for that anymore. But, really, games are literally an obsession for me."

NAG: As a comic book writer, you're more used to creating a linear story that you have complete control over. How different is it here, where players are interacting with your story, trying to do things you didn't anticipate?

Joe: "We anticipate EVERYTHING. That's one of the reasons why the story was so frustrating to work on – we found all the loopholes. We found all of the things that we'd have to go back and discover that 'people can do this but it breaks this and,' ugh. Getting that balance where we can tell a cool story and still allow it to be pretty open, so that players can go back and forth and not lock themselves out of things, was quite a nightmare, but it's behind us now, and it's cool."

NAG: After this and *40K*, what's the future looking like for Vigil Games?

Joe: "The whole studio would, obviously, love to see a sequel to *Darksiders*; we'd love to work on it, but *40K* is a huge, huge game – it's going to keep us busy for years. That's really it. If anything comes down the pipeline, we'll announce it at some point but... I hope there's nothing else at the moment; we've got our hands full already." **NAG**

Geoff Burrows



NAG: Okay, the comic book geek question: *Battlechasers* #10. You've been quoted as saying that there are



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The troops on Pandora don't take kindly to obscenely large bird droppings



James Cameron's Avatar: The Game

Walk like a ten-foot tall blue guy with a tail

Genre→ Third-Person Action Adventure
PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

MIKTAR'S E3 PREVIEW (WHICH was printed in the September issue) of James Cameron's Avatar: The Game should be more than enough to fill you in on the story behind both the upcoming movie and the videogame. For those of you who didn't happen to read that preview, here's a brief rundown of what you can expect from the story: humanity has discovered a planet called Pandora. This planet is pretty much as alien as you'd expect and it's filled with all manner of dangers – like plants that fire needles at anyone ignorant enough to wander too close to them. Being such a hostile world, you'd think that the humans (in this case an organisation known as the Resources Development Administration, or the RDA) would find it in their best interest to stay the hell away from the place. Things change when a ridiculously valuable mineral is discovered on the planet. This mineral is ingeniously called Unobtanium and it's worth 20 million dollars an ounce. Naturally, this kicks humanity's lust for new and shiny things into overdrive and we collectively decide that we must control this resource – no matter the cost. Things get pretty awkward when the RDA discovers that a race of giant blue people (known as the Na'vi) have made their home near to one of the richest deposits of Unobtanium on the planet. Diplomacy ensues and the RDA chooses to work together with the Na'vi to come to some kind of agreement. It doesn't last long (these things generally don't) and soon the Na'vi and the RDA are shooting, biting and generally harassing each other. At least, I think that's the story behind it all.



You'll have to forgive me: as I write this my copy of Modern Warfare 2 is staring at me longingly from across the room and it's proving to be a major distraction. Also, bear in mind that the game's story doesn't follow that of the film: it takes place before the events of the movie and features unique characters and circumstances.

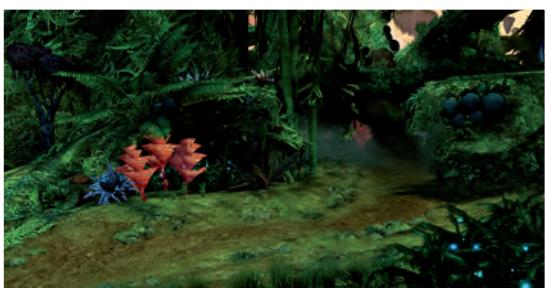
The preview code that we received from Ubisoft starts out with the player arriving on the planet Pandora. After choosing the appearance and gender of my character, the game started me out in the main RDA compound on Pandora. This compound, known as Hell's Gate, is filled with all manner of mind-blowing gadgets and super-advanced technology. After running around the main compound wearing my Exopack (it's kind of like a gas mask – Pandora's atmosphere is highly

“While the humans have advanced technology, the Na'vi are more primitive and are physically superior to the humans.”

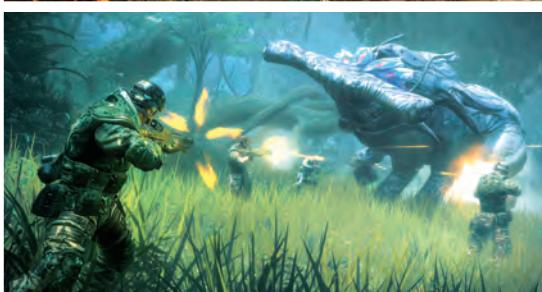
toxic) and finding ways to irritate the local soldiers, I eventually made my way into the complex's main building. Shortly after chatting to a few people (and briefly testing out my Avatar – but more on that later), I was told that I needed to report to an RDA outpost in Blue Lagoon. This led me to discover that you can travel around various locations on Pandora by talking to chopper pilots, who will fly



Warning: objects in mirror may be closer than they appear to be



you wherever you need to go. Once I'd arrived in Blue Lagoon, the real gameplay started. Throughout my time as an RDA soldier, I shot indigenous wildlife, drove vehicles and completed a number of different missions to aid the RDA's efforts on the planet. The game is looking visually spectacular and it's pretty clear that the developers are working hard to recreate James Cameron's vision of Pandora in perfect detail. The game has an open-world feel to it. Although your missions may lead you to specific locations, most of the time I was able to choose my own path in order to reach them. This wasn't made easy by some of the exotic bullet sponges that pass for fauna on the lush and vibrant planet. As I mentioned earlier, even the plants in the game are a hindrance, able to kill you before you have a chance to scream for your mom in agony. The skills that your character unlocks in the game (accomplished by earning experience) do help out with preventing your ass from being kicked/mauled/bitten off. Given that you play as both an RDA soldier and an Avatar, the game has separate skill sets and weapons for each. Allow me to explain: your character is given the opportunity to transfer his consciousness to a Na'vi body that was grown (test tubes and all that) especially for human use. These are known as Avatars and the



game gives you a chance to wield the power of one of them. While the humans have advanced technology, the Na'vi are more primitive and are physically superior to the humans. This means that playing as an Avatar involves lots of melee weapons and ludicrously powerful bows when in combat. It also means that navigating the game world requires that you ride some pretty strange and wondrous beasts. It's been common knowledge for a while now that you'll eventually have to choose your side in the game. Aligning with the Na'vi will task you with fending off the advances of the RDA, whereas siding with the corporations (and not being a hippie) will grant you access to some crazy technology and lots of insane weaponry as you fight to conquer the planet.

I caught a glimpse of what could turn out to be a very interesting mechanic in the game. Depending on whether you're playing as a human or a Na'vi, you gain access to either GMIs (for the former) or Trees of Vision (for the latter). Finding these in each sector in the game allows you to teleport to other GMIs and Trees of Vision that you have discovered around the world. They also give you access to the War Room. The War Room is essentially a mini-game that will let you build defences, recruit soldiers and move troops to conquer/fortify various sectors in the game world. It's sort of like *Risk*, with the player attempting to capture and hold territories for their chosen faction. This leads to extra XP and in-game bonuses.

There wasn't enough gameplay on offer in the preview code to really come to a verdict on how excited you should be for this game. It does look very promising, though: it's looking awesome visually and it plays well. This may just be one of the many games that you'll have to add to your Christmas wish list this year. **NAG**
Dane Remendes

Q&A:

James Cameron's Avatar: The Game



With the imminent release of *James Cameron's Avatar: The Game*, Ubisoft Montreal sent representatives to our very own rAge expo. **Alex Jelagin** had the opportunity to sit down with Brent George to chat about some aspects of the game's production.

Could you introduce yourself to our readers?

"Sure. I'm Brent George, Animation Director for *Avatar: The Game*."

Have you been working on other projects at the same time as well?

"No. We at Ubisoft Montreal dedicate ourselves to one project at a time, especially if it's a big triple-A title. There's so much to do; there's really no way we can spread ourselves thinner."

How long have you been working on this project?

"Technically, close to three years. There was a lot of preproduction between all the parties involved, including James Cameron and the teams working on the film. There was a much longer preproduction phase than normal."

How closely have you been working with James Cameron and his crew?

"Very closely. We are creative partners on a project shrouded in secrecy and mystique. We all wanted to do a really good job on it. It therefore made sense for us to collaborate closely, to make sure that the content is canon, is authentic."

There was a lot of opportunity for 'back-and-forth' [between the movie and the game], so it ended up being a very organic sort of approach. We also got to implement a number of designs - mostly of vehicles - that never made it into the movie. But because we needed more for the game, we could use them, and they were consistent with the other designs. We had access to all the preproduction material, concept material, the scripts - we had access to everything. Everything we did had to be approved by James Cameron. We had review sessions, and it was quite gratifying that every once in a while, his team would see something we'd done that they liked; and the next thing, they're on the phone to the wardrobe department [of the film project] to include something that we had done. It was a feedback loop... circular. Like I mentioned earlier, it was very organic."

In terms of staffing, was there much cross-pollination?

"We had contacts on both sides, and sometimes got paired off, so that we would have direct lines of communication. For instance, I talked a lot with the animation director for the film."

Interestingly, he himself, back in the day, had some game-design experience, which was great because he had a much better idea of what sorts of limitation we were working with. And most of my past experience had actually been in film and television - so it made sense for me to be on the project because of that. Likewise, the art directors on both sides spent a lot of time consulting with each other. There was a lot of this sort of thing going on."

Have you achieved much of a cinematic feel in the game?

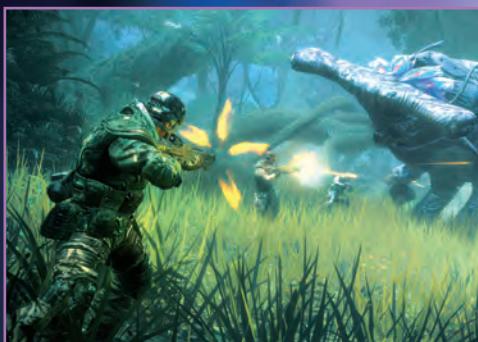
"We did what we could to give that Hollywood blockbuster feel. There are a lot of scripted events, like cinematic sequences, in the game. They're all real time, and they help set up important encounters and important plot points, and sort of dramatise it a little bit more. The challenge with capturing something that is very thematic and turning it into a game is that, unlike a film, you don't have control of the camera [while it is being experienced] and the actors - the player has that. So, the way to get around that is by inserting cinematic events. Of course, we don't want to do it too much, because that would take the players out of the experience."

Did you use a lot of motion capture?

"Actually, no; there wasn't much motion capture at all. There was definitely some, mostly for scripted events, but most of the animation was actually key-frame. Motion capture is certainly nice because it allows mass-producing a large amount of animated material quite quickly, but here we couldn't use it as much. You see, most of the creatures on Pandora have six legs, so motion capture is not going to help you there. What are the biomechanics involved in the movement of something that resembles a cross between an elephant and a rhino, but has six legs? This is an example of how our close working relationship with the film animation crew was beneficial. They had already faced and tackled this particular challenge, so instead of us reinventing the wheel, we could benefit from their experience, saving us R & D time that could then be spent in other areas of the game."

In cases where you did use motion capture, did you use the same actors as in the movie?

"No, we didn't. Some of the voice acting for the game is by the movie actors, but we didn't need to do this for the game. One



of the reasons is the fact that the plot for the game is unique – it is not a retelling of what goes on in the film. We took the major themes and the conflict depicted in the movie, and created a parallel story, to not repeat but rather enhance and extend the audience's enjoyment of Pandora. 'Playing through the movie' is a huge trap that many licensed games fall into, and it is so easily avoided by adopting the underlying themes, but writing a unique story line. There are, however, moments when some of the major characters from the film show up as NPCs [non-player characters] that the player comes into contact with, so players can get the feeling that they're existing in the same universe as the movie, but with a different perspective on it."

Is the game also going to support 3D technology?

"Oh yeah! 3D is new – it's exciting. We have here in front of us a piece of gaming history. This is the first triple-A gaming title natively supporting stereoscopic technology – on a console. This has, until now, been unheard of; it has been something that has been exclusive to PCs. We are here offering the same sort of technology as you get in 3D cinema. This is definitely [the] next thing... the next step in the evolution of home entertainment. And we have here the perfect licence to introduce this new way of looking at things. Of course, most people would need a new TV to enjoy 3D, but though that means that many won't be able to do this,

I say it's like watching a movie in stereo [sound] or in 5.1 – if it's a good movie, it's still a good movie in stereo."

Tell us a bit about your biggest challenges.

"I think maybe primarily overcoming the responsibility of working on something so big. I'm really proud of the team. We all worked really hard. The team is a little over 150 strong, encompassing all aspects: the programming, the design, graphics, sound, animation and so on. The other challenge was the graphics. The challenge to make the game look awesome and next.... while still being enjoyed on 2D, because the majority of people will not have 3D televisions. So we needed to make it hold up to other next-generation games even in the conventional viewing mode. Another element of the juggling act, conversely, was to make sure that not only would it look awesome in 2D, but that it would also play awesomely on 3D – this being a whole new frontier. So we had to simultaneously work in two different worlds, really."

What other graphical elements did you have to interface with?

"Primarily the modelling department... You see, the modellers are the ones who are basically building our 'puppets' that we are going to be moving around. This was another of those feedback loops, like I mentioned before. For example, as we were animating some of the models,



particularly the human soldiers, we felt there was something missing. We needed to lend the motion a sense of more weight. So we asked the modellers: 'Can you make some pouches or something [and] add them to the models?' And yes, they could. It turned out to be pretty easy. And so, in the end, we ended up adding quite a bit of secondary motion to the figures, making them appear more ponderous as they moved. This sort of cross-pollination in solving problems is one of the most valuable aspects of a game's development. But, of course, it is also one of the greatest challenges. You have a lot of people working in a number of groups, and each has its own agenda and priorities; so it takes a bit of diplomacy and tenacity in approaching situations where you don't want to make someone else's job harder. But, at the same time, you need to get certain things done."

Anything you'd like to add?

"Well, you know, this has been about working on something that's tied in with a film that I, personally, am greatly anticipating. So it's been fun – it's kind of like the kind of thing you dream about when you're a little kid. It was also really nice to work in a situation where we weren't subordinate to the project we were busy with. We were given the task and given freedom to run with it. And, while there was a lot of interfacing, it was support and not dictatorship. It was very easy to fall in love with a project like this." **NAG**



Stand back, or I'll...
er... paint your face!



Epic Mickey

Mechanical Donald

Genre→ Puzzle Platformer

PC 360 PS3 **Wii** PS2 PSP DS

IT'S NOT OFTEN THAT you'll read a preview of an upcoming Disney game in this magazine. It's even more uncommon to find a preview of a Wii game in these pages. Then again, it's not often that a gaming icon such as Warren Spector - who is credited with the creation of *Ultima Underworld*, *Thief*, *System Shock*, and *Deus Ex* - sells his recently formed studio to Disney and jumps on board for a Wii-exclusive platformer centred on Mickey Mouse. Yeah, we were a little confused too, at first.

That was before we had a chance to see it in action, and witness Warren Spector excitedly regale a hall full of journalists with the story behind *Epic Mickey*. The tale takes place with one foot in the Disney archives and the other in a dark, twisted dystopian world created by Yen Sid, a powerful sorcerer from Disney's 1940 film, *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*. The world is populated by all of Disney's rejected cartoons from throughout the studio's history, starting with Oswald the Unlucky Rabbit. Oswald was one of the first Disney cartoons. It had a short-lived 'career' at Disney, and spent the rest of its life at Universal. It was only recently that Disney re-acquired the rights to it. As the years go on, and popular Disney characters including Mickey, Goofy and Donald become more popular, Oswald's discontent grows into a terrible brooding anger. One day, when Mickey finds Yen Sid's map and inadvertently devastates Oswald's home, he is pulled into the world and forced to face all manner of terrifying creatures.

Epic Mickey is a puzzle platformer. The



player will control Mickey in Oswald and Yen Sid's twisted world through a simple, yet versatile system of painting and erasing elements in the game world, including puzzle pieces, terrain and any jealous foes out to destroy Disney's favourite rodent. To go with this freeform system of puzzle solving, exploration and combat, is an open-ended approach to character development. The more you erase (which is about as close to killing as you'll get in this game), the darker and more sinister Mickey becomes, moving him closer to the designation of Scrapper. Help to rebuild the world with Mickey's magical painting skills, and you'll soon be known as a Hero. Or, if neither strikes your particular fancy, straddle the line between the

two and overcome the game's various obstacles, however you see fit. Spector boldly claims that each player will have their own unique experience as they

play through the game, with certain actions locking the player out of entire quest chains and characters.

The gaming experience is designed to suit your specific style of play, to the point where there are many boss battles that can be avoided altogether by simply being a pal, and helping them remove whatever thorn happens to be in their side.

There's no doubt that *Epic Mickey* is a 'Disney game', but Spector's historically dark game-design career and strong RPG background look like they might just manage to bring the game into focus for the more mature audience, while still managing to satisfy the younger crowd. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows



Developer→ 4A Games Publisher→ THQ Web→ www.metro2033game.com Release Date→ April 2010

Metro 2033

It's going to be a long night

Genre→ First-Person Shooter
PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

GAMES FROM OBSCURE EASTERN European developers have the habit of being brilliant in concept, but often fail to deliver when it comes to gameplay. It's a good thing, then, that *Metro 2033* is being developed not by an obscure Eastern European studio, but rather one that's managed to balance quality assurance with interesting concepts. While 4A games has only been around for a few years, and they've only been working on *Metro 2033* since, a large portion of their team is made up of former GSC (the studio responsible for the *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* series) employees. This experience, combined with THQ's watchful eye being cast over every operation the studio undertakes, should ensure that *Metro* lives up to its legacy.

Based on the novel of the same name (which is currently undergoing translation for Western release), *Metro 2033* is set in the bleak Russian subways following an apocalyptic event in the year 2013. The world aboveground has gone to ruin, and Russia is forced to live out its



days in the relative safety of the metro system. Twenty years have passed since the events that destroyed the world, and humankind has moved on. Small "nations" have developed; people of common goals and ideals grouped together and, as is human nature, began bickering and even attacked opposing nations. Some states are peaceful, content simply to get on with their lives and raise a generation that's never known the Sun's warmth. But others, like the Neo-Nazi and Gangsters,



care only for war.

Metro is a horror/survival/action FPS that's sure to chill you as readily as it entertains. The dark underground is filled with enemies, some human and others mutant, called Dark Ones, who are out for blood. The player will need to scavenge for weapons, barter for supplies and equipment, and explore the dangerous depths of the underground if they intend to survive.

NAG
Geoff Burrows

Genius
Live with Ideas

5 Mega Pixel Handy Digital Camcorder



DPF-800



SP-HF500A



GHP-04DJ



G-Shot V1200



SP-HF1800A



G-Shot DV510

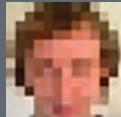


The Reviewers

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NEWS FEED

What's on your mind?



Miktar Dracor
1 minute ago

Even if we can't win, let's win anyway! If we win, we can't lose!

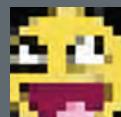
[Comment](#) • [Like](#)



Walt Pretorius
Yesterday at 8:03pm

Some will win and some will lose, some were born to sing the blues. I just play FarmVille all day.

Chris Bistline and 10 others liked this



Dane Remendes
2 days ago

I love you so I told you a lie. Hey, wait. I'm not actually on Facebook! This is fiction!

[Comment](#) • [Like](#)



Tarryn van der Byl
4 days ago

is too busy unlocking Achievements to write something on her wall. NERDRAGE!

[Comment](#) • [Like](#)



Chris Bistline
Like, forever ago.

doesn't Facebook anymore. Sadpanda.gif

[Comment](#) • [Like](#)



Michael James
Six weeks ago

was last seen being the hapless trendwhore that he is, off in the jungles of Fadtopia...

[Comment](#) • [No Licky](#)



Adam Liebman
Last month

Okay fine Miktar, I'll accept your friend request. But you'd better not abuse it.

Miktar likes this



Geoff Burrows
Two months ago

I was made for dancin'! All-all-all, all night long! Through the Hall of the Mountain Dude!

[No Comment](#) • [Like](#)



Alex Jelagin
Forty-two years ago

Now I remember how it goes! Ooo eee, ooo ah ah! Ting tang walla walla, bing bang!

[Nobody liked this](#)

Anatomy of a Review

A quick guide to the NAG Reviews section

VITAL INFO: Who made it, who's putting it on shelves and where to find more information

GAME NAME: It'd be a bit confusing if we left this bit out. Now it comes with a short summary, too!

BOX OUTS: More good stuff. Just in a box.

The screenshot shows a detailed breakdown of a game review. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links for 'Review', 'Developer → Capcom', 'Publisher → Capcom', 'Distributor → No More Interactive', and 'Web → www.nag.co.za'. Below this is a large image of a Street Fighter IV fight between Ryu and Ken. To the right of the image is a summary of the game's features and mechanics, mentioning 'Street Fighter IV' and 'Don't call it a comeback or retro-revival this is fighting redefined'. Below the main image are several smaller screenshots showing different fighting scenes and character models. To the right of these images is a large block of text providing a detailed review of the game's combat system, character variety, and story mode. At the bottom right is a 'The Score' box containing a star rating of 12+, a PEGI 12+ rating, and a link to www.pegi.info. The score box also includes a 'Plus' section with three bullet points ('Simple yet deep', 'Balanced', 'Challenging') and a 'Minus' section with two bullet points ('Lacks better instruction', 'Medals only awarded for online play'). A 'Bottom Line' section concludes with the text 'A true evolution for the series that knows what to keep and what to cut.'

GENRE AND PLATFORMS: What kind of game is it, and what platforms does it come on. All available platforms are in white, the one we reviewed it on is in yellow.

CAPTIONS: A picture's worth a thousand words. Here's 20 or so...

SCREENSHOTS AND ARTWORK: The game looks something like this, presumably

The Score

Breaking down the box

AWARD: Is this game worthy of our praise? If so, it gets an award. See details below.

MULTIPLAYER ICONS: How many players per copy, players per server, and players in co-op, respectively

PLUS/MINUS: What we liked, and what we didn't, in concise bullet-point format

THE BOTTOM LINE: Here's where we condense the entire review into 20 words or less. Because reading is hard...



AGE RATING: Let's see some ID, son

SCORE: Further reducing our bottom line to a number out of 100

97

Editor's Choice Award

If a game bears this award, then it rocks. It does everything right – pure and simple. We don't hand these out every issue.



Must Play Award

Essential playing for fans of the genre. These awards aren't as rare as the Editor's Choice award, but if you see one, take note.



Pony Award

This isn't an award anyone can be proud of. If a game gets this award, then it's rubbish and you should avoid it like moss on a sandwich. We keep it only for the best garbage.



What We're Playing

Here are the top 20 games we're currently playing in the NAG office

#	Game Name
1	Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2
2	Borderlands
3	Dragon Age: Origins
4	Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War II
5	FarmVille
6	Forza Motorsport 3
7	Aion
8	Batman: Arkham Asylum
9	Brutal Legend
10	Buzz! Brain of the World
11	Call of Duty 4 single player
12	Crysis
13	Excitebike: World Rally
14	Tekken 6
15	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 10
16	FIFA 10
17	Operation Flashpoint: Dragon Rising
18	Pro Evolution Soccer 2010
19	Section 8
20	Uncharted 2: Among Thieves

Distributors

Apex Interactive	[011] 796-5040
Asbis	[011] 848-7000
ASUS SA	[011] 783-5450
Axiz	[011] 237-7000
Comstar	[011] 314-5812
Comztek	0860 600 557
Core Group	[087] 940-3000
Corex	[011] 655-8800
Cosmic Comics	[011] 476-9640
Drive Control Corporation	[011] 201-8927
EA South Africa	[011] 516-8300
Esquire	0861 700 000
Eurobyte	[011] 234-0142
Foxcomp	[011] 912-6300
Frontosa	[011] 466-0038
Incredible Connection	0860 011 700
Intel Corporation	[011] 806-4530
Legend Memory	[011] 314-0817
Logitech SA	[011] 656-3375
Look & Listen	[011] 467-3717
Megarom	[011] 361-4800
Microsoft	0860 225 567
MiDigital	[011] 723-1800
MobileG	[021] 982-4606
Ne14 Solutions	[082] 490-1510
Nology	[012] 657-1317
Nu Metro Interactive	[011] 340-3000
Pinnacle	[011] 265-3000
Rectron	[011] 203-1000
Sahara	[011] 542-1000
Samsung	0860 726 7864
Sapphire ATI	[044] 384-0225
Sonic Informed	[011] 314-5800
Ster Kinekor Entertainment	[011] 445-7700
Syntech	0861 274 244
TVR	[011] 807-1390

If your company isn't listed here, phone NAG on [011] 704-2679

Web Scores

How do our scores compare to everyone else's? We've provided scores from Metacritic and Game Rankings for reference.

[NAG](#) // [Metacritic](#) // [Game Rankings](#)

AION



BORDERLANDS



BRÜTAL LEGEND



FIFA 10



FORZAMOTORSPORT3



TEKKEN 6



UNCHARTED 2: AMONG THIEVES



XGR

Discover the Difference

R59.95



Noise Reduction Headset

XGR headphones will let you enjoy a disturbance-free experience with maximum comfort and superb performance. Excellent for personal CD music, interactive games and video conference.

R199.95



2.4GHz Gaming Wireless Mouse

Have style and comfort in your palm. This mouse has three levels of speed change without drive. It is free moving within 10m. 1000-1600 adjustable dpi. Power on/off button for long battery life. Customizable side buttons.

R69.95



Mini Notebook Mouse

Enjoy a mouse with a stylish appearance, glossy finish and superior navigation technology. By using the latest in optical technology, this mouse delivers more accuracy and control on most surfaces than ever before. Retractable rubber band line.



Available country wide



It's not cel-shaded, FFS!

Cel-shading is a very specific style of non-photorealistic 3D rendering, characterised by flat, discrete sections of colour instead of blended tones. Cel-shading is not outlines. *Borderlands* is not cel-shaded - it just has outlines. NAG FACT! Now go intimidate your friends with it.



It's nothing like Mad Max, you fools!



Borderlands

Borderlands? More like Cracklands, amirite?

Genre→ Action RPG

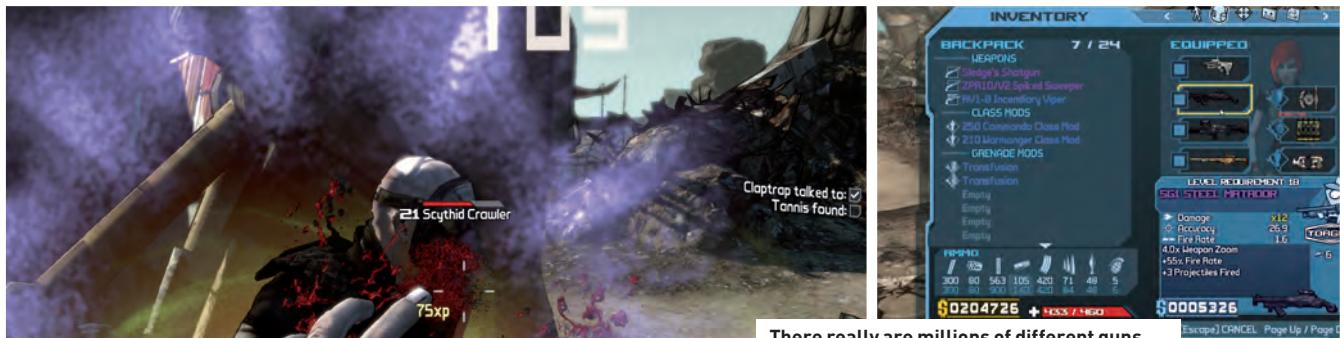
PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

THIS IS PANDORA: A gasping, sun-blasted bad land, populated almost entirely by dust, rocks, and things designed exclusively to kill people. This is evolution hard at work in a very real, very National-Geographic-Worst-Places-in-the-Universe-Special sort of way. Sometime in the past, naïve (stupid) colonists arrived here, presumably intending to find a better life for themselves. So, either they were leaving some sort of toxic planetoid just off the sun's equator, or they didn't know about stuff like advanced terraforming and recon operations and prime real estate. Anyway, they turned up on Pandora, quickly discovered what a thoroughly ghastly place it is, and promptly began saving up for tickets to go somewhere else instead. In the meantime, someone (predictably enough) tripped and fell over a bunch of alien ruins with (predictably enough) a mysterious legend about a mysterious alien vault with heaps of mysterious alien junk in it attached to them. So, at least there's something touristy to do while everyone's waiting to catch the next space taxi off the planet. Or something like that.



This game is all about 17 million procedurally generated guns; not some irrelevant, conceited, supercilious pseudo-literary so-called "story." Who has time for narrative subtext when you're bum-rushed by a gang of ululating psychotic midget goons, anyway? All you really need to know is that you're here on Pandora, and you should be shooting stuff and grabbing any stuff the dead stuff drops, so you can shoot more stuff with better stuff next. "It's *Diablo*,"

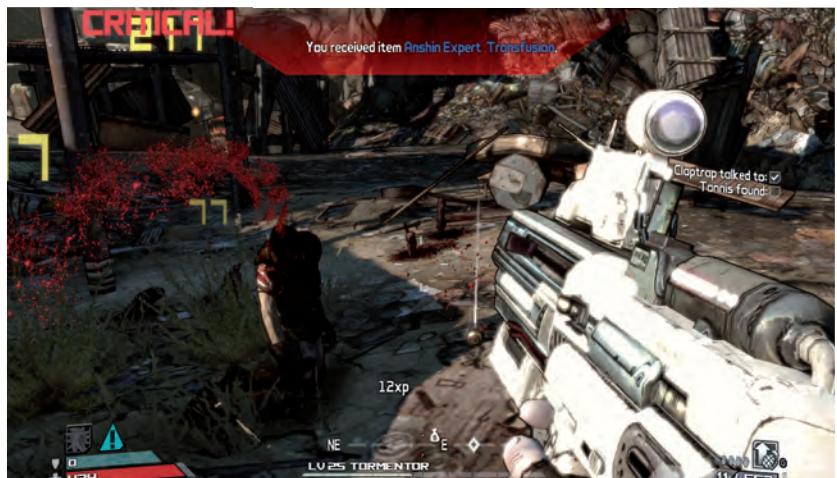




There really are millions of different guns...

Borderlands DLC

The first downloadable content (dubbed *The Zombie Island of Dr Ned*) for Borderlands was scheduled for release on November 24th. The DLC will have players working with a doctor named Ned in an area known as Jakobs Cove to quell a zombie uprising. In addition to zombies (**zombies!**), the area is said to be filled with other abominations as well. In addition to these new enemies and new quests, Jakobs Cove will also supposedly be filled with rare loot drops. We love us some rare loot drops, so we're pretty excited. The DLC is available for \$9.99 on PS3 or 800 MS points on Xbox 360. At the time of writing, no confirmation had been given as to whether or not PC players will have access to the DLC.



went the marketing buzz... "with guns." And that's more or less exactly what *Borderlands* is. Elsewhere, *Titan Quest*'s quietly distinguished career as the number one *Diablo* clone has just gone down in flames.

Of course, *Borderlands* is quite sly about being a *Diablo* clone. It doesn't play like a *Diablo* clone at all because it's an FPS. It's also an FPS that treads the perilous edge of FPSes pretending to be RPGs with entirely unprecedented impudence. Where almost everything else has stumbled and fallen off into

ignominious perdition, *Borderlands* dares to swagger along with suave confidence. And probably a cigar. Simply, alongside all the *Diablo* clone bits, *Borderlands* is a superb FPS. Also, it has shotguns that shoot rockets.

But back to the *Diablo* clone bits. There are four characters/classes on the roster: Mordecai the ranger guy; Brick the crazy punching guy; Roland the soldier guy; and Lilith, the obligatory chick with boobs and elemental magic that all the guys will play because she has boobs - even though Mordecai is obviously (**obviously**)

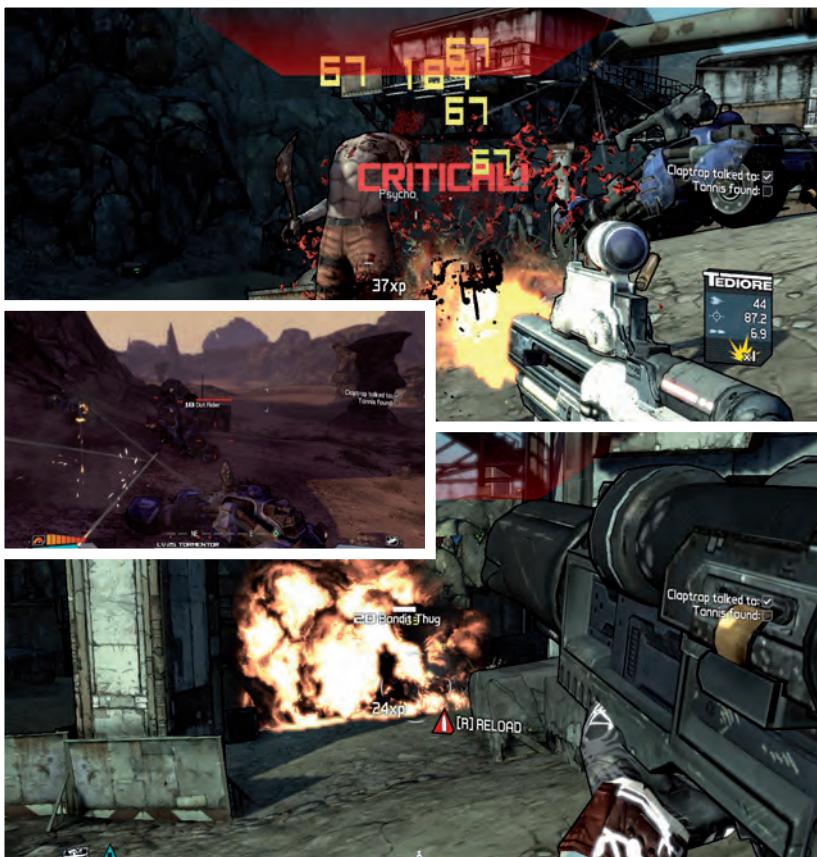


Second Opinion (PC)

Borderlands is addictive. It's **irresponsibly** addictive. It's also ridiculously entertaining. That's really the best way to describe it. It's kind of like *Diablo* got a bit tipsy one night at a scummy bar and woke up next to *Quake* with a hangover. Protection is overrated and so, a while later, *Borderlands* was born. The PC version of *Borderlands* is pretty much identical to the console versions, but (as Randy Pitchford, CEO of Gearbox Software, himself admitted) it just looks better on PC. There's also the benefit of having a mouse and keyboard to control your FPS action. Other than that, the experience is essentially exactly the same across all platforms. There is one problem with the PC version of the game, though: at the time of writing this, the online, multiplayer matchmaking system in the PC version of *Borderlands* was broken. It's almost impossible to get a cooperative multiplayer session up and running without tweaking router settings and fiddling with things that shouldn't have to be fiddled with - so keep this in mind. Thankfully, the developers have acknowledged this issue and we're sure that by the time you read this, a patch will have been made available that fixes this extremely irritating bug. *Borderlands* is a fantastic game. Try it! You'll love it.

Dane Remendes

88



Rolling with the in-crowd

Experts agree that *Borderlands* should be played with friends, because everything's better in a crowd and because squabbling over orange drops is a great pretext for dumping your rubbish girlfriend or boyfriend. The game supports two-player split screen (console only), and up to four-player cooperative online multiplayer (console and PC).

Third Opinion (360)

Borderlands is a pride parade of Good Ideas: a good FPS with a good RPG layered on top (as opposed to *Fallout 3*, which is an RPG with an FPS tacked on). It features a lean story for better replay value (if it were meatier with more cut-scenes, it would get in the way); Deathmatch and Team Deathmatch in Arenas for fun; Duel Throw Downs (activated when two players melee each other) for resolving arguments over which quest to do next in co-op; a single button for swapping Driver/Gunner positions in a vehicle while on the move (fine, **YOU** shoot and **I'LL** drive); and countless other little touches that make the overall experience horrifically addictive - as Big Loot games tend to be. Split-screen co-op play on the Xbox 360 has its problems, like certain Achievements and in-game goal glitches (such as "shooting X amount of enemies with Y elemental effect"), preventing you from getting them unless you start up a single-player game. Split-screen is limited to vertical orientation, so inventory, map and skill screens are too big to see in their entirety and have to be moved around using the right analogue stick. Frustrating, but not deal-breaking. Few had expected *Borderlands* to be this good, so our sleeper hit of 2009 arrived just in time.

Miktar Dracon



87

the best character. Each class has its own speciality (a totally awesome bird-bat pet thing that is totally awesome and destroys everything and wins the game; going berserk; a portable turret; and a sort of invisible dash, respectively), as well as three main career tracks. And because gamers are such fickle beasts, Gearbox has kindly included an option for completely rearranging all those skill points as often as you like. There are no class restrictions on weapons, so players are free to shoot with anything that shoots. Things that shoot, however, come in several categories, and shooting with one category of shooting things will improve your proficiency with that category of shooting things and add a damage bonus. Fortunately, the game drops things that shoot by the truckload,

so you can pick favourites quickly and get busy shooting skags.

Anyway, I'm going to chuck all this sleek, professional, objective review guff, and get on with the vulgar proselytising. Go now. Go and buy this game. It's terrific. It's a riot. It's the most pointless, self-serving fun with guns I've had, since... forever. I actually carried on playing the game after level capping my character and bagging all the Xbox Achievements. I never do that. I have other Achievements to waste my time with. BUT I CAN'T STOP PLAYING BORDERLANDS. I'm going into catastrophic withdrawal sitting here typing this. I took my last *Borderlands* break after the third paragraph. It's been at least an hour and I'm supposed to be out stuffing fish in Treacher's Landing and... **NAG**

Tarryn van der Byl

The Score



Plus
+ Madly addictive

Minus
- Madly addictive

AVAILABLE AT
Look & Listen
For the Plus!

Bottom Line

The most compelling loot grabber since *Diablo II*.

92

JAMES CAMERON'S

AVATAR

THE GAME



DECEMBER 2009

WATCH THE MOVIE,
PLAY THE GAME



DVD
ROM



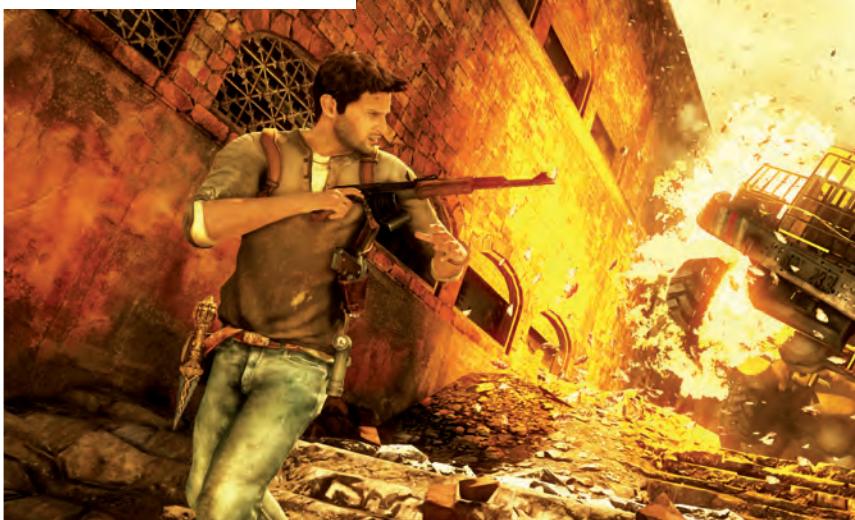
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This is why you shouldn't drive behind people with your brights on...



Uncharted 2: Among Thieves

So much awesomeness... We're not sure what else to say

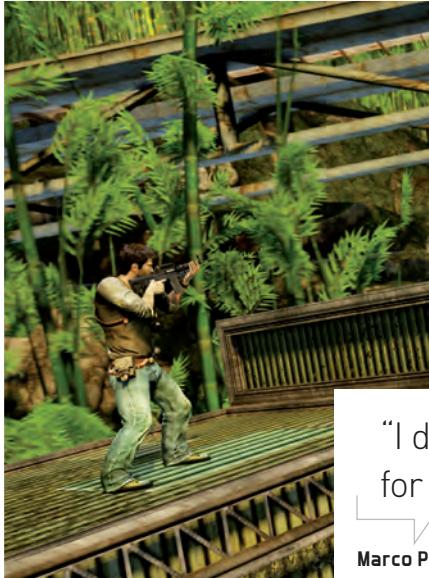
Genre→ Third-Person Action/Adventure

PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY if we told you that *Uncharted 2: Among Thieves* is flawless? You're probably crying out something along the lines of "Impossible! No game is flawless!" and we don't blame you - because that's entirely true. Games are made by regular folks like you, me and the rest of us. Developers need sleep and wake up with the same feeling of "just a few more minutes" that the rest of us do. They read their material of choice while on the john - just like we do. They get tired after a long day at work - same as all of us. They wake up with strange rashes on their happy bits after a night of heavy partying just like... some people do.

It's understandable then that, like the rest of us, the work that they do isn't entirely perfect and there are always flaws that pop up from time to time. But what if we told you that *Uncharted 2* is so close to being absolutely flawless that it scares us every time we let our minds wander and think of the game's brilliance? I didn't play the original *Uncharted*, but it's incredible how good this sequel is. Let us tell you about it.

Among Thieves starts out with Nathan Drake (the protagonist) sitting on a train, covered in blood and snow. This is how the game starts: with the player entirely unaware of how Nate came to be in his current predicament. I say predicament because it turns out that most of the damn train is dangling precariously from the edge of a snow-covered cliff. The car that Nathan is in is (obviously) the one hanging at the very bottom. This kicks off the game in spectacular fashion, as newcomers are introduced to Nate's



"I did not tell **half of what I saw**,
for I knew I would not be believed."

Marco Polo

brashness and sarcasm, while anyone who played the previous title is thrust into a very dangerous set piece right from the start. This all leads to a perilous climb to safety, as parts of the battered train car crash down to the ground far below Nate as he (with the player in full control of his actions) makes his way up to the cliff's edge. It's difficult to describe just how cinematic and intense this opening sequence is, and it sets the tone for the rest of the game perfectly. Eventually (after lots of acrobatics and playing around in the snow), we're taken back in time to the events that lead up to the cliff segment. It's set approximately two years after everything that went down in *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune*, and since

then, Nate has been hanging around with some pretty shady people - essentially a bunch of thieves. This bunch eventually convinces Drake to go after the lost treasure of Marco Polo (see one of the box outs scattered around these pages for more story info). This treasure hunt takes players all over the world - from the jungles of Borneo to a museum in Turkey, this game gets around. Not only that, but each location in the game is an absolute jaw-dropper thanks to the power of the Naughty Dog Engine 2.0. Speaking of jaw dropping, it's absolutely insane how well the animations (both character and facial) have been done in *Among Thieves*. The characters' body language and their facial expressions subtly tell a

Blu-ray

For the Fans



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and at www.lookandlisten.co.za



The Story

Here's a short history lesson: when Marco Polo departed from China to return home after spending nearly twenty years in the court of the Mongol Emperor Kublai Khan, he did so with a fleet of fourteen ships carrying over 600 passengers and literally boatloads of treasure. When he eventually reached his destination nearly two years later, Polo's fleet had been reduced to just one ship carrying only eighteen passengers. This all took place in 1292 – centuries before the events in *Among Thieves*. Although Marco described almost every aspect of his journeys in intimate detail, he never explained what happened to the thirteen ships that were lost. This is the focal point of the story in the game. Drake follows the trail of Marco

Polo's fleet in order to find the Cintamani Stone – an ancient, wish-fulfilling jewel that'd grant great and terrible power to anyone who gained access to it. Since Drake believes that finding the Cintamani Stone for Kublai Khan was the real motive behind Marco Polo's doomed voyage, he's all in – and the player is with him every step of the way. There's also the fact that the stone would be worth millions today, which gets Drake (and us) pretty excited – although Nate's intentions do get nobler as the story progresses. We just want the treasure.

The story in *Among Thieves* is great – it's got all the makings of a timeless adventure classic like the *Indiana Jones* films, and it's executed almost as well.



Zombies!... Sort of



story that most games can't convey the way that these do – they really have to be seen to be believed. Couple this with the fantastic voice acting (particularly Nolan North's voice acting – he's the guy who voices Drake) and the characters in this game are astoundingly (and unnervingly) human, despite their virtual nature.

Much of *Uncharted 2*'s awesomeness lies in its intense action sequences. Fire fights in this game can get ridiculously heated, with grenades flying around, cover being torn apart and bastards with riot shields bashing you into a stupor. The AI plays a major role in the combat system here and their aptitude for being able to flank Nate and flush him out of hiding never stops being impressive. The

AI is able to do pretty much anything that Nathan can, so expect to see enemies climbing ladders, leaping across gaps and pretty much just being wonderfully annoying. The (entirely optional) stealth system lets you gleefully mess around with the AI, tricking them into ambushes by showing your face and then quickly slipping back into a hiding spot to clobber them later. The melee system is very useful, both when engaged in stealthy hooliganism and when simply running and gunning.

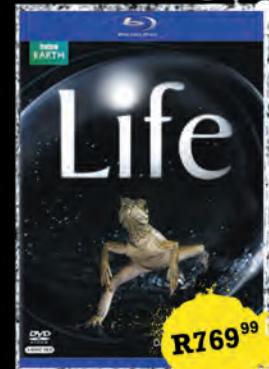
The game's combat is broken up by the sort of platform-style sequences that you'd expect to see in *Tomb Raider*. The animation here is once again phenomenal (although it's not perfect – there are



The Hangover
Available from
the 7th December



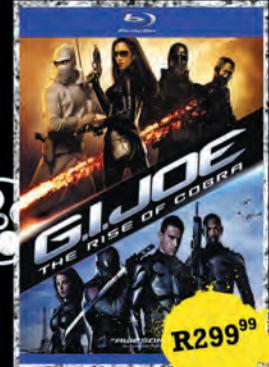
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Available from
the 7th December



Life
(4 Disc)
Available from
the 7th December



Up
(Blu-ray/DVD combo)
(2 Disc)
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the 7th December



G.I. Joe
Available from
the 7th December



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The Multiplayer

Uncharted 2 addresses one of the major complaints that many players had with the first game: it had no multiplayer. Naughty Dog saw fit to add a number of different competitive and cooperative multiplayer modes. These are those modes:

COOPERATIVE

The game's cooperative mode supports up to three players, each one taking control of one of the heroes from the game's single-player campaign. Split up into a number of different missions, each cooperative game requires that players complete each mission's objectives while fighting to keep each other alive (players can revive teammates that get taken down). Gold Rush is a cooperative game mode that sees players trying to retrieve treasure while defending against the onslaught of AI enemies. It's split up into rounds, and if a player goes down and is not revived soon enough, he/she is out until the next round.

COMPETITIVE

There are four competitive game modes in *Among Thieves*. Each one sees two teams (heroes and villains, which are made up of characters from the single-player campaign) of five players battling for bragging and tea-bagging rights. Players can choose their character models and can gain points to rank up. Two boost abilities can be selected that will augment each player's abilities.

DEATHMATCH

The first of the game's four competitive modes is standard deathmatch. Basically, shoot things until they stop screaming.

PLUNDER

It's like capture the flag, but with treasure. The teams battle to capture treasure from a point on the map and drag it back to their base. The player hauling the loot is slowed down, but the treasure can be tossed away or passed to another player in dire situations.

ELIMINATION

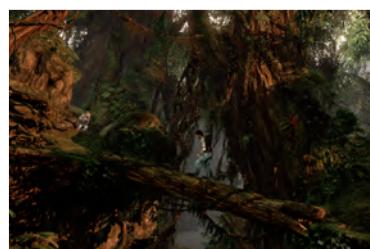
Does what it says on the box. Players don't respawn and the goal is to eliminate the enemy team in a best-of-five fire fight.

CHAIN REACTION

The final competitive mode has players capturing flags across the map (each map features five flags), but the flags must be captured in a specific order (with each flag in the sequence inching closer and closer to the enemy base).



If you're going to sleep with your best friend's girlfriend, first make sure he doesn't own a gunship



some strange animations that crop up every once in a while and most of these acrobatic sequences seem to be pulled straight out of Hollywood blockbusters – such as one in which you're trying to outmanoeuvre a gunship while climbing up the side of buildings in a Nepalese city. These sequences are interspersed with nail-biting scripted events that see floorboards collapsing beneath Nate and handholds suddenly giving way as Nate desperately struggles to prevent himself from becoming a gooey splotch at the bottom of whatever massive chasm he's defying this time.

From a technical point of view, there's really no way to bring this game down. It looks amazing. It's definitely one of (if not the) best-looking games out there at the moment. It might not boast the raw graphical power of *Crysis*, but this game is artistically awe-inspiring. The sound effects, music and voice acting add personality to this great-looking game world masterfully, and *Among Thieves* is truly a pleasure to spend time with.

There really isn't any other way to say it: *Uncharted 2* is unquestionably one of the best games ever created. It's a major triumph in every way for the developers at Naughty Dog: it's action packed, it's

got great characters (together with an interesting storyline) and it's just a really fun game that doesn't stop rewarding the player for their time spent locked in the game world. I could continue waffling on about why the game is good, but I feel like all I would really be doing is robbing you of time that you could be spending playing the game. To quote Marco Polo himself: "I did not tell half of what I saw, for I knew I would not be believed." Play this game. **NAG**

Dane Remendes



The Score

- Plus**
- Stunningly cinematic
 - Brilliant voice acting
 - Excellent gameplay

- Minus**
- I'm not Nathan Drake

AVAILABLE AT
Look & Listen
For the Plus+

Bottom Line

Uncharted 2: Among Thieves is simply amazing. Play it.

96

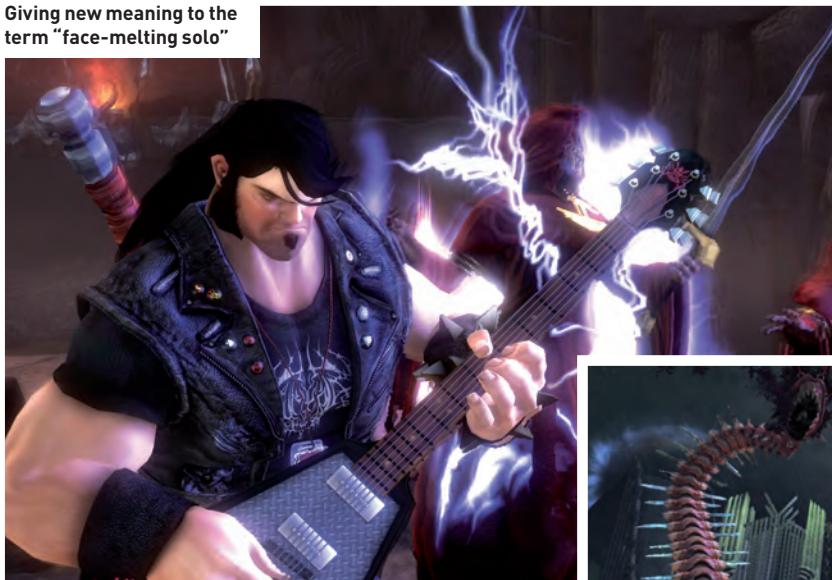


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Giving new meaning to the term "face-melting solo"



Brütal Legend

It is a demon screaming, it is an angel singing.

Genre→ Action Adventure / Real-time Strategy

PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

THIS IS AN IDEA game. It's all about the content, and the *mythos*. If being Jack Black trapped in the ultimate heavy metal hell (or heaven, depending on your perspective) is the kind of thing that really gets your motor running, then nothing else will matter. The particulars on the game mechanics used to tell the story are irrelevant to the theme of the game. Because of this, none of the genres 'invoked in' *Brütal Legend*, a multi-genre game, excels. They're refined, but only to the degree that is necessary to facilitate exploring the heavy metal world, and not one bit beyond it.

Much like the team's previous game, *Psychonauts*, in which you played a young boy dropping into people's psyche to cure their mental health problems, *Brütal Legend* is a flawed gem. Its concept outruns its reach, and while this is most certainly the team's most sophisticated and polished game to date, its flaws are hard to overlook unless you really just don't care about anything but the plot. The upgradeable *God of War*-styled combat system, real-time strategy bastard child of lost PC classic, *Sacrifice*, and half-hearted side-missions may rub you up wrong now and again. The lack of being able to place your own markers on the map to guide you may be frustrating.

But if you're willing to let your hair down and just head bang to the beat, explore the stunningly imaginative and detailed heavy metal fantasy



world, and laugh your ass off at the top-notch humour in the game, then you've come home.

EXPLORING THE FANTASY

Getting around involves dropping The Deuce, Eddie Rigg's car that rides with strong rear-wheel push, which may feel strange initially. How Riggs got to the heavy metal world is in the intro. We're not going to spoil a damn thing. There's plenty to explore outside of the main storyline missions: you can earn Fire Tributes by ramping over things (which are used at Ozzy Osbourne's underworld store to upgrade the car, combat and other things); find Tab Slabs, which teach you new Solos (potent spells cast by playing a *Guitar Hero*-styled mini-game); uncover Buried Metal, which unlocks more metal music tracks; or hunt down Artifacts of Legend, which tell the back-story. Landmark Viewers dot the landscape, giving you a cut-scene of surrounding points of interest, and almost every animal can be mounted and ridden (there is a funny Achievement

involving the Razor Boars).

Bound Serpent statues, which give you health, speed or power boosts if you free enough of them, can be found along the major routes. Sometimes you have to search a little. The "collect-a-thon" is firmly checked off on the features list here, though the map neglects to indicate which ones you've found. If you're going to go for 100%, print out a map and mark them off. You'll thank us.

STAGE BATTLES

When two opposing forces meet, there is the sonic collision that is Stage Battle. Incidentally, it is this part of *Brütal Legend* that was designed and programmed before everything else. So, while for some it may be their least-favourite part, because they don't like the real-time strategy elements and would rather be a god of war hacking and slashing through the entire game, or they (with good reason) are at odds with the lack of a mini-map, it is the most polished area of the game in terms of gameplay.

During single player, your faction

Cool Stuff

HEAD BANGERS, EMO GOTHS, KINKY DEMONS

Stage Battles are also the multiplayer component of the game, and you can play any one of the three factions online (or against an AI opponent offline for practice).

IRONHEAD

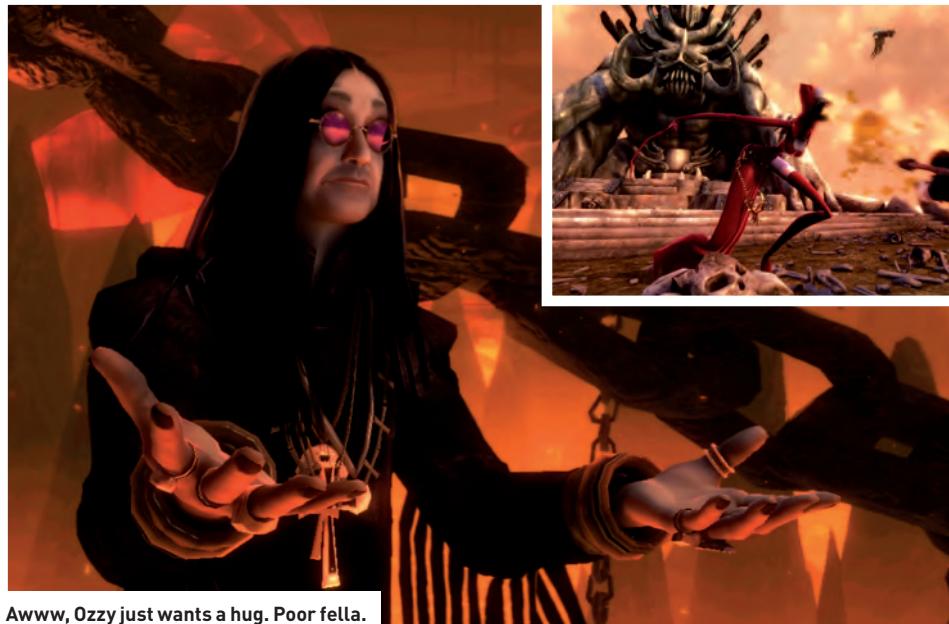
Head bangers, glamour girls and bass players on motorcycles that heal units around them with their low, sultry tones. Fast, mobile and powerful, Ironhead is a straightforward faction to play. With a good spread of units, especially at low level as the Razor Girls' Double Team, Ironhead is great for early-game avatar harassment.

DROWNING DOOM

Totally Goth-metal Emo, the Drowning Doom may not have the stalwart stamina of Ironhead, but they more than make up for it with powerful debuffs (spells that lower opponent efficiency). Their low-level basic unit, the Gravedigger, comes with more units in the group than normal melee troops, but they need to be tended to as they have less health.

Tainted Coil

Kinky S&M demon types with a bizarre unit structure, the Tainted Coil is the 'expert' faction to play. They're much harder to get going and suffer early in the game, but once they've got their hierarchy of builder units up, they're a serious force. Unlike the other two factions, most of the Tainted Coil units are not built from the Stage, but rather from other units like the Nun, Warfather and Overblessed.



Awww, Ozzy just wants a hug. Poor fella.



during Stage Battle is Ironhead, with Eddie Riggs acting as avatar, makeshift mouse cursor, and spell dispenser. After your stage has been built (with a fantastic visual effect mimicking time-lapse photography), the rush is on to create units and get them to a Fan Geyser, to build up a Merchandise Booth that will in turn give you more fans with which to build more units. You can queue up units from anywhere on the field and, once you have it, play a Solo that moves the rally point for newly built forces to where you are. Solos are integral and vital to Stage Battles, especially ones like Summon, which calls all your units to your current location - even ones out of earshot. Usually, commands issued to units (go there, come to me, defend this) only 'happen on' units in earshot, or if you need to be specific, units you are 'selecting' by holding down Y and moving a cursor over them. Issuing special orders to specific units is very important for stealth-type forces. Solos are also your tide of battle-changing spells, summoning flaming Zeppelins to

crash into the field, or melting the faces of enemy units around you.

It is possible to direct most of the Stage Battle from the air, where movement of your avatar mouse cursor is at its fastest. You'll still need to drop down to play the Solo that builds a Merch Booth. Units in the field have tall beacons above them - indicating what they're up to, such as attacking, dying, and so forth - which are visible from anywhere on the field - but in no way replaces a decent mini-map, something the game could only benefit from. Stage Battles are, at their peak, crazy, action-packed train wrecks of explosions, guitar solos and Double-Team attacks. When hitting the right button near any unit, your leader will double-team with it for a stronger, more direct attack that can change the outcome of any skirmish. It's this tug-of-war between being involved on the battle field, yet remaining aware of what's going on elsewhere on the field that can be either heaven or hell, depending on your personal predilection for coming to terms with what the game is trying to do.

IN THE END

The main storyline is too short. The Stage Battles are hit or miss, depending on how you feel about them. And yet, this is exactly the type of game that reminds us of what is possible with gaming as a storytelling medium, as a flight of fancy to a realm that cannot possibly exist. It may not be the greatest game ever made, but it is one of the greatest ever told. **NAG**
Miktar Dracon

The Score

				16
1	2	None		www.pegi.info

Plus

- + Amazing soundtrack
- + Stunning art style
- + Laugh-out-loud funny

Minus

- Four to six-hour storyline
- Drab side-missions
- Poor waypoint navigation

Bottom Line

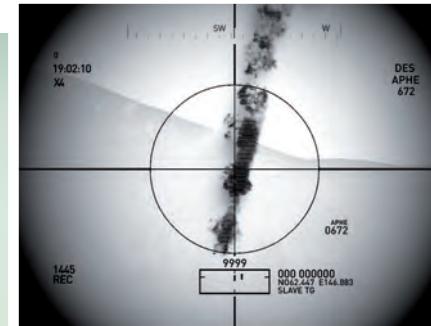
Invigoratingly fresh, even with all of its problems.

85

AVAILABLE AT
Look & Listen
For the Fans



Camper sniping B!%@#!



Operation Flashpoint: Dragon Rising

Whoever said war is hell wasn't kidding

Genre→ Tactical
PC 360 **PS3** WII PS2 PSP DS

RELEASED BACK IN 2001, the original *Operation Flashpoint* put a different spin on the military squad-based shooter genre, offering a far more realistic and challenging combat experience than many of its rivals. Although Bohemia Interactive (the developer of the original title) is no longer on board, Codemasters seeks to pick up right where they left off with the game's long-awaited sequel, *Dragon Rising*.

Set in the year 2010, on a small island off the coast of Japan, *Dragon Rising* drops the player amid a brewing conflict between Chinese and Russian forces. The island, known as Skira, is home to vast natural resources, which China seeks to wrest from Russian control. Your role is as part of an American Marine Corps detachment sent to quell the looming storm, through 11 challenging missions across the troubled island.

It must be noted from the onset that *Dragon Rising* plays quite differently to most tactical shooters on the market. Anyone expecting the kind of run-and-gun heroics that typify the *Call of Duty* series will have a very hard time adjusting to the slow and deliberate pace of *Dragon Rising*. This is a game in which each move you make has to be carefully planned and executed. This is a game where your character will require a good few seconds to unpack a rocket launcher before he can equip it, and where a single stray bullet can easily spell a quick and merciless demise for you. Throughout the game, your squad consists of three additional members, waiting to follow your orders as you trek across the 277 square



kilometres that make up the island of Skira. Each of the eleven missions is long and challenging, particularly on the higher difficulty levels where checkpoints are sparse, and death means potentially having to replay some very arduous sections of the game. Of course, this also means that succeeding in your objectives is accompanied by a truly satisfying feeling of accomplishment.

Less satisfying, unfortunately, is the artificial intelligence, both of your enemies and your fellow squad members. Given the tense nature of the game, and the immense pressure you're under throughout the campaign, incompetent squad members can become very frustrating very quickly. It's not uncommon to see your teammates trying to take cover on the wrong side of an object, or blindly running across your line of fire while you're shooting at foes. Of course, your enemies are prone to acts of similar stupidity, which, while

less annoying, detracts shamefully from the realism of the title. It's not to say that the AI is always pitiful. In fact, there are moments when everything comes together seamlessly. It's just that these bizarre missteps are too commonplace to be overlooked.

Bugs and glitches are also not limited just to the AI. There are some minor visual niggles that plague the game from time to time, as well as some slightly more frustrating play-dynamic problems, such as when checkpoints fail to properly activate without any apparent reason. On higher difficulty levels, where the game strips away elements of your HUD and spaces the checkpoints farther apart, this can become quite an annoying occurrence.

As for the actual combat mechanics in *Dragon Rising*, there's little to complain about. Each of the missions is very open-ended, allowing you sufficient freedom to be inventive with your strategies. Your enemies' tactics aren't fixed either,

making every mission a dynamic entity that changes each time it's played through. Couple this with an arsenal of more than 70 different weapons and a wide variety of vehicles, and it's apparent that *Dragon Rising* certainly doesn't skimp on depth. It's this depth and realism that set the game apart from the rest in the tactical shooter genre. This is particularly apparent in the online multiplayer modes, since playing with a team of four human-controlled characters does away with the frustration for which the clumsy AI is responsible. There are both team-based and competitive modes on offer, with support for up to eight players. It's not quite as impressive as the 32-player multiplayer matches that are to be found in the game's PC counterpart, but it provides an edgy and an engaging tactical experience, nonetheless.

Visually, *Dragon Rising* is competent, even though it fails to be remarkable. The open-plan world is impressive by virtue of its size alone, even if it is somewhat lacking in detail. The character animations are, for the most part, fluid, though they are plagued by the occasional glitch. The game fares better in terms of sound, with convincing effects and



DLC

If you have the PC version of this game, make sure to visit the official site now. A 'Skirmish' DLC pack, which features some new maps, missions, helicopters, a bunker assault and other tweaks and fixes, was made available on 5 November. [January DVD, Ed.] Then, besides the official stuff, there's a nice site dedicated to the game at <http://ofp.tek-9.org>.



"It's not uncommon to see your **teammates trying to take cover on the wrong side of an object, or blindly running across your line of fire while you're shooting at foes."**



a haunting score that accompany the menu screens. The voice acting, though very useful for conveying information on the battlefield, is somewhat choppy and ham-fisted, though forgivably so. Given the prowess with which the game's opening cut-scene tells of *Dragon Rising*'s back-story, it's a shame that in between missions, you'll have nothing more than a mission-briefing screen to fill you in on the details of the developing story. Nonetheless, *Dragon Rising*'s minimalist presentation is very effective, and adds much-needed shine to a game that's sadly a little too rough around the edges.

As with its predecessor, *Operation Flashpoint*, *Dragon Rising* takes a different approach to the tactical shooter genre, offering a very slow-paced and methodical gaming experience that's very far removed from the frenzied shooters to which most people are accustomed. It demands a lot more patience and concentration than other shooters, though it offers rewarding challenges for anyone willing to persevere long enough to master this complex title. It's unfortunate that the game is hampered by bugs and glitches; and the occasionally haphazard artificial intelligence certainly makes *Dragon Rising* a more frustrating experience than it needs to be. Nonetheless, as a "military simulator," *Dragon Rising* is undoubtedly a robust title, and one with much to offer, especially in its multiplayer modes. Fans of the original are likely to be impressed, though had the final product been a touch more polished, it's likely that it would've offered much to attract fans of other series too. **NAG**

Adam Liebman

The Score	
1 - 4	2 - 8
	2 - 8
	18
www.pegi.info	
Plus	Minus
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Realism + Challenging 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Temperamental AI - Occasionally unforgiving

Bottom Line

A methodical shooter set in the realism of war, *Operation Flashpoint: Dragon Rising* is a robust title, albeit one lacking enough polish.

AVAILABLE AT
Look & Listen
For the Plus

76

Aion's gorgeous visual practically beg you to pose your character for screenshots.



Aion

Float like a butterfly

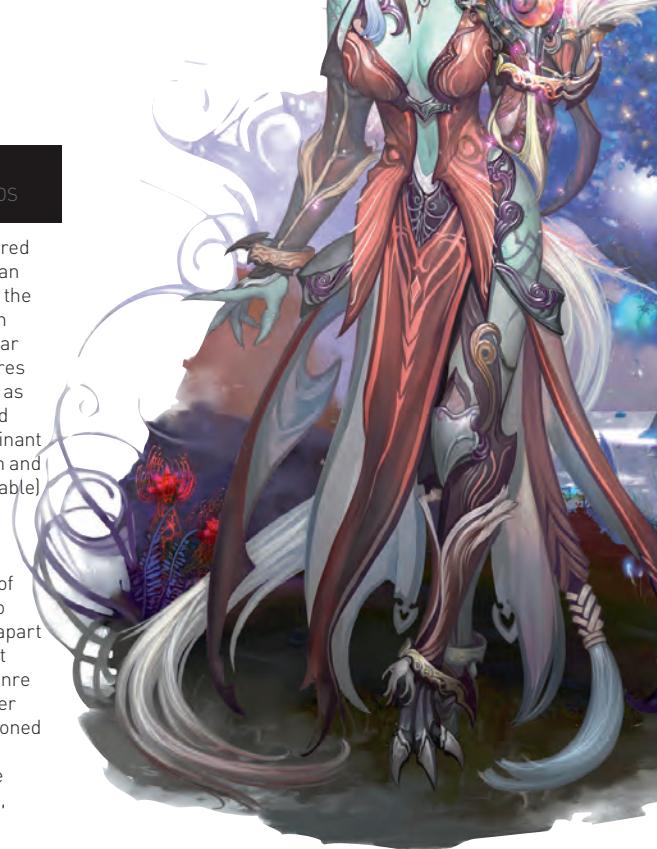
Genre→ MMORPG

PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

YOU KNOW GAMING HAS officially entered a new generation of visuals when an MMORPG runs on an engine that has the word "Cry" in its name. *Aion* has been available in South Korea for over a year now, and has now arrived on our shores as a mature game that looks as good as it plays. It takes place in the shattered world of Atreia, where the three dominant races of the planet – Elyos, Asmodian and Balaur (the latter of which is not playable) – battle it out for superiority.

Aion is not for newcomers to the MMORPG genre. It follows the mould that's been laid out by over a decade of modern online RPGs, but manages to offer just enough variety to set itself apart from the pack. And, because of this, it expects you to be familiar with the genre right from the point where you register your account. Everything is as a seasoned player of these types of games would expect. On the negative side, you'll be bugged by repetitive quests, grinding, irritating gold sellers and too much time spent travelling between points, but on the other side of the coin exists an excellent storyline, fantastic visuals, exciting PvP and some pretty cool skills and abilities.

During your first few levels of play, there's a constant feeling that you're on the losing end of some sort of battle. Everything is an effort, but you're urged on by the pretty trees and intriguing quests, so you continue. If you do manage to get through the beginning part of the game without being completely overwhelmed, you'll suddenly realise what it is that *Aion* offers. The game isn't



about the moments, or the short term. Every time you go out to complete one of the billion "bring me 17 mongoose noses" quests, you're one step closer to understanding the scope of this game. It takes a long time to do anything, especially the massive (and, I often think, *too big*) crafting system, but it's all worth it in the end. *Aion* rewards grinding. It wants you to spend a lot of time in the world, whether you're hunting down AI mobs, gathering rare fruits for your perfect Pavlova, or honing your skills in the wastelands of the Abyss. As you

Into the Abyss

Level 25 is an important milestone for an *Aion* character: it qualifies to enter the Abyss, which is an open PvP ("player vs. player vs. environment") zone. Of course, while you pursue these quests, you need to stay alert – at any moment, an enemy could swoop down and attack you! This makes for a rather tense (some might say "exciting") experience when questing in the Abyss. Furthermore, some quests require PvP.

As well as free-form skirmishes, there is also a more strategic side to the ongoing three-way war. The Abyss has several fortresses scattered across its three layers, as well as a number of artefacts. Control of a fortress grants its occupying faction control of the surrounding area. Controlling large areas of the Abyss grants a faction certain global benefits, which **all players of that faction** get to enjoy. Artefacts, if controlled, can be activated, and will have temporary yet very powerful effects – some localised, some global. Quite intense battles between large groups of (generally) high-level characters are fought to gain or keep control of fortresses and artefacts.

As well as the faction-on-faction warring described above, there is also more 'formalised' PvP in the form of duels, which you can challenge another player to (and which he or she can accept or decline), and arena combat (in the coliseum at each faction's capital city). Of course, it is quite natural for someone to decline a duel with someone of a much higher level.

There is an unusual element in *Aion*'s PvP: in each faction's territory, there are two regions whence and hence rifts open – rifts connecting Elysea and Asmodae directly. This means that, periodically, it is possible for an enemy contingent to be present on friendly soil. This is particularly dangerous, because you are in a PvE area, in a PvP mindset, so it is easier to be taken by surprise.

To summarise, *Aion* has a very strong PvP component, which can even be said to dominate the game to an extent (as you can get drawn into it against your will in some areas, and there is no 'PvP On/Off' toggle, so it is almost always a looming threat). However, this is not true to such an extent that the game would only appeal to hard-core players. It does, however, mean that the PvP aspect is quite deep and well developed.

Alex Jelagin

Class action

There are four major classes in Aion, each with a specialisation that you choose when you're given your wings and access to your appropriate capital city.

MAGE

Very squishy but capable of high damage output, the Mage is best left to the rear of the pack. They can specialise as either a Sorcerer or Spiritmaster. Sorcerers concentrate on damage dealing and enemy control, as the latter is their only real method of defence. Spiritmasters are the only real pet class in the game, able to summon elementals. They are also capable damage dealers in their own rights, but mostly rely on their summons to keep the enemies at bay.



SCOUT

The Scout balances damage dealing with damage mitigation – preferring to avoid incoming blows than put their armour to the test. Their specialisations are Assassin and Ranger. The Assassin concentrates on dealing damage close up, and relies on cunning and stealth to make sure the favour is never returned. Rangers have exceptional archery skills, and use traps to help ease the burden of being without a pet – they are a particularly expensive class due to the cost of both arrows and trap ingredients.



PRIEST

The only class capable of any decent healing, the Priest is almost guaranteed to find a friendly group wherever they travel. They can specialise as either a Chanter or Cleric. Chanters are monk-like characters that can heal allies, provide them with benefits from their mantra magic, and deal damage with their staves to any enemies. Clerics are tougher than Chanters, and focus on healing their allies (and reviving downed friends) above all else. When it comes to the crunch, however, they're not afraid to defend themselves with shield and mace.



WARRIOR

"Have weapon, will kill things," best summarises the Warrior. They're the ones at the front of the battle, and can choose between the Templar and Gladiator specialisations. Templars are heavily armoured characters that are built to soak up damage, but can also wield a two-handed great sword when necessary. Gladiators are also heavily armoured, but prefer to concentrate on dealing damage rather than taking it, and enjoy putting their expert training in pole arms to use.

progress through the game, you're rewarded with tons of new things to do, and new places to visit. Every time you start to lose interest, or get bored of repeating the same things over and over again, you're greeted with a warm smile and a gentle pat on the back to tell you "it's all been worth it."

Of course, there's a side to this that isn't so light and fluffy – this game is not for the casual crowd. If you want to get anywhere in this world, you have to put in the hours. Most of the crafting skills only become really useful once you've crafted your first 100 items or so, with the exception of Alchemy, which lets you craft healing potions quite early on. What this means for the more hard-core, or seasoned players, of course, is that most people in the game world are more or less on the same page. The trade system is so alive that it's enough to keep you busy for hours on end, and people are constantly looking for groups to complete quests, and helping each other out with their various problems.

Aion is a bit of a mixed bag. While it certainly offers plenty to keep the existing



Asmodian wings: They are, quite simply, cooler-looking than the Elyos variety.

crowd of MMORPGers happy, it's not really designed to appeal to anyone else. It's not a big deal, because the divide between MMO players and non-MMO players is usually pretty clean-cut, but the world and characters within are incredibly interesting. It's almost a shame that so many people won't take the dive and experience it all. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows



Plus
+ Great visuals
+ Engaging storyline
+ Lots for veteran players

Minus
- Steep learning curve
- Not for casual players

Bottom Line

If you have the time and effort to invest in the next big MMORPG, Aion should be perfect.

AVAILABLE AT
Look & Listen
For the Plus

80



He who dies with the most toys wins!



Forza Motorsport 3

Back in the driving seat

Genre→ Racing

PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

MICROSOFT'S XBOX-EXCLUSIVE RACING

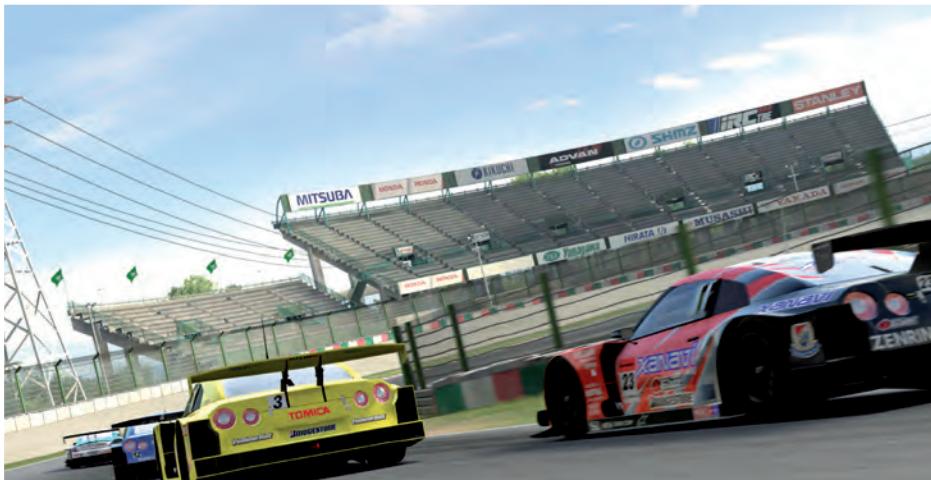
TITLE is something of a new kid on the block. While it has been around since the days of the original Xbox, *Forza Motorsport* has had few releases as a franchise. This places it at something of a disadvantage: it hasn't had the exposure of the PlayStation-exclusive *Gran Turismo* or the ever-present *Need for Speed*. Yet, Turn 10 Studios have managed to consistently deliver games that impress, and this third iteration is no different.

South African fans have had even less exposure to the brand, with only *Forza Motorsport 2* having seen an official release locally. But, despite this, the game has managed to gather quite a following, thanks to its slick presentation, heaps of depth and (most importantly) a massive degree of accessibility.

This accessibility is vital, because it opens the game to a wider audience... whether players are casual racing fans who want an easier experience or die-hard petrol-heads, *Forza* offers them something to enjoy.

And *Forza 3* is no different. The game is very scalable in terms of difficulty, with many driving assistants and even an automatic upgrade system that allows the most casual of players to enjoy it. On the other hand, dedicated driving fans can dig down and adjust cars on a variety of levels, for that grease-monkey feel that many find so very appealing.

Playing *Forza 3* comes in many 'flavours'. The player can take on single races, career mode or, naturally, multiplayer races. The career mode has seen a few significant changes from the

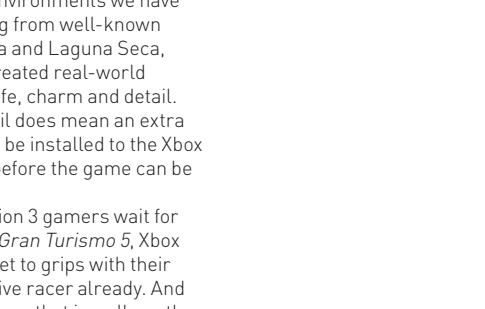
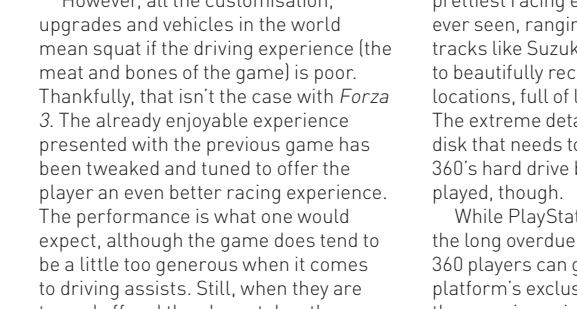


last outing, with the whole idea now being based on racing seasons. The player is shunted through a calendar year and needs to compete in races as they become available. The player will be able to choose which smaller events to take part in, but will be forced to play through the events of a major series. Win or lose, the passage of time within the title presses on. This means that not performing well in a particular race will affect the player's overall season – quite different from the more free-form approach taken in *Forza 2*, which allowed the player to take on events as they chose, and replay events free of the fetters of time.

The player still has the option to replay events, though, thanks to another menu option. Each race that the player takes part in, whether in career mode or not, adds to the player's overall driver level, as well as to the purse of winning that the player earns. And there is no need to finish first, either. Even placing last will

reward the player with experience and money, although less than they would get for ending up on the podium. The money that is earned can be used to buy upgrades for cars in the player's garage, or to buy new cars. Even if new cars are a little out of the player's in-game budget, new rides are constantly entering the experience; the player will be given a new car with every driver level achieved, meaning that the vehicles available for use in the game grow very quickly.

And there are a great many cars to choose from. *Forza 3* offers one of the largest selections of in-game cars from manufacturers around the world, ranging from small, entry-level vehicles right through to powerful monster-machines. These cars can be customised in terms of performance and visuals (with the latter being something that the *Forza* franchise has managed to gain quite a reputation for). The visual customisation is made even better



The Score

Plus	1 - 2	2 - 8	None
Minus	www.pegi.info		
Bottom Line			
Forza 3 continues the short but fine tradition established by the franchise.			

AVAILABLE AT
Look & Listen
For the Plus

90



with the inclusion of a 'flat canvas' for the player to create vinyl-based artworks on... the potential for creativity presented by this title is massive.

However, all the customisation, upgrades and vehicles in the world mean squat if the driving experience (the meat and bones of the game) is poor. Thankfully, that isn't the case with *Forza 3*. The already enjoyable experience presented with the previous game has been tweaked and tuned to offer the player an even better racing experience. The performance is what one would expect, although the game does tend to be a little too generous when it comes to driving assists. Still, when they are turned off and the player takes the tougher route to the finish line, *Forza Motorsport 3* presents the player with a thrilling simulation.

A major new addition to the racing experience is the option to rewind the race and try certain sections again. This option becomes available when even the smallest mistake is made... even leaving the track with two wheels makes the rewind option pop up. While this may seem like a bit of a cop-out, it actually offers enthusiasts a chance to really test their vehicles and skills. The player can retry the approach to a certain corner, for example, without having to re-drive the whole race (or even the lap leading up to it).

The driver AI is pretty good too, although the opponents are a little easy to best for the most part. Realistically, the AI drivers aren't perfect, and the resulting accidents mean that the player may have to get around impromptu obstacles at speed – a nice extra bit of challenge.

Forza 3's performance is matched by its looks. The cars are all faithfully recreated, both on the inside and outside.

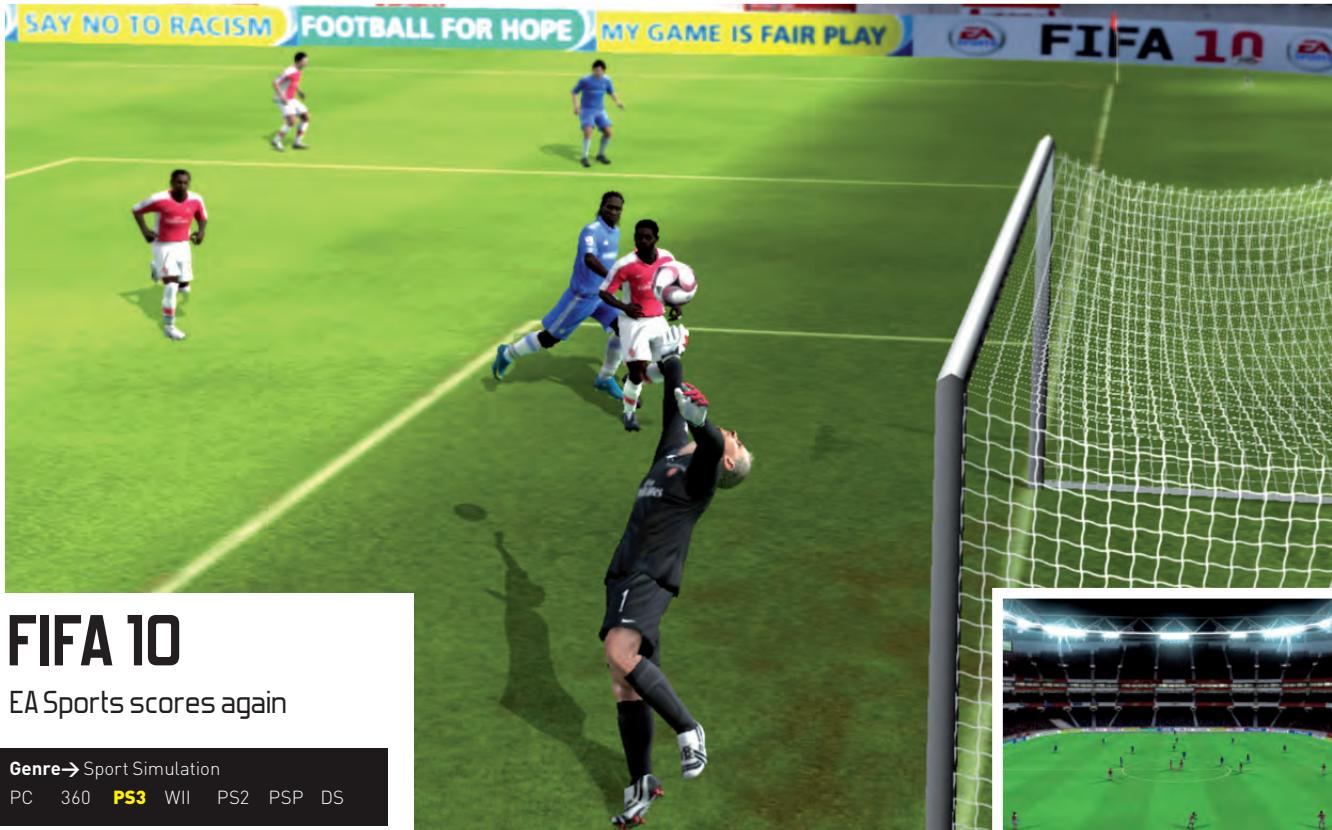
Realistic cockpits, complete with working dials, help the player feel as though they are experiencing the real thing. And the tracks? Well, these are some of the prettiest racing environments we have ever seen, ranging from well-known tracks like Suzuka and Laguna Seca, to beautifully recreated real-world locations, full of life, charm and detail. The extreme detail does mean an extra disk that needs to be installed to the Xbox 360's hard drive before the game can be played, though.

While PlayStation 3 gamers wait for the long overdue *Gran Turismo 5*, Xbox 360 players can get to grips with their platform's exclusive racer already. And the experience is one that is well worth going through. *Forza Motorsport 3* is a fantastic addition to the franchise, and offers enough tweaks and refinements to be a true and decent next iteration in the series. The multiplayer modes and wide variety of vehicles also mean that the game is going to be spinning in Xbox 360 disk trays for quite some time. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius

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90



FIFA 10

EA Sports scores again

Genre→ Sport Simulation
PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

ELECTRONIC ARTS OWES QUITE a bit of its massive success as a game publisher to the EA Sports division, which in turn owes much of its success to the *FIFA* franchise. Initially released in 1994, this franchise has grown from strength to strength over the years. And this year's release is a crowning jewel.

FIFA 10 is the kind of game that might seem like 'just another release' at first, but it soon becomes apparent that the tweaks, enhancements and changes made to this title are incredibly important to deliver an experience that is so real, you might as well be strapping on your soccer boots. With this release, the franchise has established itself as the soccer simulation king (at least for this year).

FIFA 10 presents the player with a game that feels far better than the previous title. With refinements having been made to the 360-degree dribbling system, new ideas introduced to ball handling and dynamics, player strengths having been fine-tuned, and a host of other improvements, this game flows beautifully through each simulated match. More than ever before, it feels like the real thing, and even though this has resulted in a marked decrease in score margins, the number of close calls and cheer-out-loud moments has grown significantly. One industry insider asked me how I thought they could improve on this title in future. I am still at a loss for an answer to that question.

With a great look and feel, *FIFA 10* is a football fan's dream. The controls feel better too (although sometimes the buttons can be a little sensitive, particularly when



shot power comes into the picture), and the whole thing just seems to be that much more playable and accessible.

Major improvements have been made in numerous areas of the game, not least of which are the refinements made to the 'Be A Pro' mode – the part of the game that allows the player to make use of an individual footballer, running their career through a number of games. Additionally, some tweaks have been applied to the Manager mode, making it a much more enjoyable experience.

All the normal modes are present, of course, although this year, the game delivers a big push towards online gaming... in the wake of *FIFA 09*'s online success, this is hardly any kind of surprise. This may prove problematic for some local gamers who want to take the game a little more seriously, but the pick-up-and-play potential of *FIFA 10* is as big as (if not bigger than) any other title in the series.

The changes made to *FIFA 10* may not

seem that impressive when listed, but they certainly show in playing the game. The new 'power' of this iteration ticks along quietly under the hood, delivering an experience that is addictive, entertaining and completely awesome.

NAG
Walt Pretorius



The Score



Plus
+ Accessible
+ Excellent tweaks and improvements

Minus
- Very online focused

Bottom Line

This is, without a doubt, the best soccer simulator to hit the market in a long time.

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Pro Evolution Soccer 2010

And the runner-up is...

Genre→ Sport Simulation
PC 360 **PS3** WII PS2 PSP DS

THE TUSSLE BETWEEN EA'S *FIFA* franchise and *Pro Evolution Soccer* continues, but things are a little different now that EA has released *FIFA 10*. Where many once felt that *PES* offered a more realistic experience, the near-arcade nature of the game becomes even more apparent when compared to *FIFA*'s much more realistic approach in this latest iteration. In addition, *FIFA*'s long list of very real improvements makes the changes in the new *PES* look rather cosmetic. However, none of this means that *Pro Evolution Soccer 2010* is a bad game.

A number of tweaks and overhauls have been made to the game, but the overall engine is starting to look a little frayed at the edges. It's not too bad, but it certainly is starting to show its age, to a point where those tweaks and overhauls are far less effective than they should be.

The graphics, for example, are far better, with awesome player likenesses and really good lighting effects adding a strong sense of realism to the title. However, the controls (particularly the dribbling) are starting to feel a little dated. In fact, the whole affair is a little disappointing at first, particularly for those who have seen *FIFA 10* in action. The feature set is fairly small, the presentation is not what it should be, and the whole thing just seems to be a little too anachronistic.

The proof, however, is in the pudding, and playing *PES 2010* results in more fun than one might expect. It's the kind of game that results in howls of delight and defeat, with action that is a little more over the top than it should be. Fast-paced



ball tussles and ambitious shots are common sights during a *PES 2010* game, particularly when there's another human on the other side of the pitch. There are a lot of bugs that show up too, though, and not the kind of grass-dwelling ones that might normally be found on a football field. But these bugs are generally eccentricities: there might be one or two that could affect the outcome of a game, but that won't happen often at all.

On the other hand, Konami's claim of improved goalie intelligence is a little spurious... the goalie seems to be thicker than ever, and will (at times) do nothing while a blazing shot zips past his head and into the back of the net. The score levels may have been reduced in this game, but it still feels more like an action title than a sports simulation at times.

Despite its problems, *PES 2010* is still a solid and very enjoyable game, and fans of the series will certainly be happy with the improvements that it features. The lack

of licences is still off-putting, though, and in the face of the competition, this game pales. The fans will be happy, yes, but an undecided player will probably opt for EA's offering this year.

NAG

Walt Pretorius



Plus

- + Good graphics
- + Still fun to play

Minus

- Feels dated
- Some bugs

Bottom Line

While the game feels dated and clunky next to the competition, *PES 2010* is still an enjoyable simulator.

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ASUS ROG Maximus III Series Motherboards

Lose oneself in the heat of battle—not lose to gloating opponents—with greater in-game immersion and molten-smooth responsiveness.

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The best gaming experiences, ironically, are when you actually forget you're gaming. That's what ROG Maximus III Series motherboards appear singularly designed to bring about. Not only do they eliminate the realism-killing lag that plagues online gaming through cutting-edge features such as GameFirst, a cunningly clever traffic shaping technology that lets you enjoy low ping times, and Speeding HDD, a dual channel technology ensures stutter-free gameplay through doubled data transfer rates, they come with an immersion-enhancing audio solution—SupremeFX X-Fi—which delivers the ultra-realistic soundscapes you need to amp up your gaming experience. The Maximus III Series also features ROG Connect, a revolutionary OC tech that lets you monitor and make on-the-fly adjustments to your main system via a notebook—just like a race car engineer! Last but not least, they're equipped with MemPerfect, a nifty memory tuning tool that automatically tweaks your memory's settings based on the frequency you've selected—even spotting, diagnosing and fixing errors along the way! Whichever form factor you choose—the ATX Maximus III Formula or the mATX Maximus III GENE—if you're a serious gamer, these motherboards aren't just impressive, they're downright miraculous.



Enemy shields take forever to whittle down in the game. Thankfully, getting up close and personal ignores shields, letting you quickly take down foes. It does mean, however, that you're similarly vulnerable...



Section 8

Burning in, baby!

Genre→ First-Person Shooter

PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

I WAS REALLY LOOKING FORWARD to *Section 8*.

Every preview that I'd read on the Internet preceding the game's release 'tweaked my memory' back to my days of playing *Tribes* and similar games online. Those were good times and I really couldn't wait to dive into some multiplayer mayhem that seemed (based on the aforementioned previews) like it would mimic much of the *Tribes* series' fantastic gameplay. Thankfully, after first loading up *Section 8*, I was pleasantly surprised by the enjoyment that I initially got out of the game. This enjoyment was short-lived, however, when playing against bots eventually just wasn't doing it for me anymore.

Allow me to explain. The time that I've been spending with *Section 8* - awesome as it may be - makes me feel like I've slipped into some parallel dimension populated by only myself and a hateful AI that derives pleasure from simply putting me up against a number of mindless AI drones to keep me somewhat entertained in a virtual world while it drains my body of the resources that it contains. It's kind of like *The Matrix*, except that I'm Neo (Keanu Reeves passed the torch to me) and there's no one else in here with me but a bunch of Agent Smiths. What I'm trying to get at here (in a very long-winded fashion) is that *Section 8*'s servers are empty. There's barely ever another human in sight. The few games that I've joined that were actually populated (by a pathetic number of players) were quickly emptied because there just aren't enough people playing this game. I don't quite understand this because it's not a bad game at all. As I mentioned, there are bots in the game and they do put up a decent fight - but it's just not the same as joining a server filled with a bunch of gamers.

Section 8's multiplayer gameplay (don't bother with the single-player campaign - it's essentially a barely average tutorial for the multiplayer) involves a capture-



the-point-style system, which has players [read: me] fighting to capture strategic points scattered across the map you've chosen. Each capture point held gradually increases your team's [read: bot buddy's] score until you hit the score limit, at which point you win the match. These capture points also spawn defences that resist enemy [read: bot baddies] attempts to recapture these points. Among these defences are anti-air turrets. I mention these because the sky plays a major role in this game: it's your spawn point. Players can choose any spot on the chosen map to spawn, after which they'll be launched out of a dropship from thousands of feet above the ground and land with a satisfying crash in order to continue the fight. This is called "burning in," and it's awesome. The only thing stopping you from indiscriminately burning in straight on top of enemy bases are the aforementioned AA guns, which tend to shoot you down before you hit the ground. Killing enemies and completing Dynamic Combat Missions (or DCMs) earn you cash, which can be used to burn in vehicles, support stations (where ammunition can be replenished and load-outs can be customised) and turrets. DCMs are optional objectives that pop up during matches and can be

completed to gain an advantage over the enemy. They range from VIP escort missions to Capture-the-Flag-style intelligence gathering, and they do a good job of mixing things up during matches.

Section 8 is a good game. It introduces a number of nifty new ideas to the multiplayer arena that would make for a fun online experience - if anybody were actually, you know, playing the game online. The game's success will be decided by whether or not the online community appreciates what it has to offer. **NAG**

Dane Remendes



Plus
 • Great multiplayer potential
 • Burning in is amazing

Minus
 - Low server population
 - Lacklustre single-player campaign

Bottom Line

Section 8 offers a fun multiplayer experience. At the moment, however, there aren't any people playing the game to enjoy the multiplayer with.

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Wii



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Wii Remote not included



Tekken 6

15 years later still the best 3D fighter

Genre→ Fighting

PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

TEKKEN 6 IS ONE of the better 3D fighters of 2009. In fact, it is quite possibly the best 3D fighter of the year. It's been 15 years since the original game, and save for *Tekken 4*, each one has been a notable improvement on its predecessor. *Tekken 6* is possibly the most significant change to the series since *Tekken 3*.

Tekken 6 is not only the most impressive in terms of gameplay in the series, but in presentation as well. From the opening movie sequence, which features some of the most incredible visuals in any opening movie of any game, to the in-game cinematic movies, everything's rendered impressively, and the voice acting is very good. The in-game graphics are also worth a mention, as they out-class that of any other 3D fighter currently available. Not only are the animations smoother than ever before, but the character details and fight locations (of which there are plenty) are nothing short of incredible. With a roster of over 40 playable characters, one would have expected some shortcuts, but that's not the case. Each character is beautifully rendered and brilliantly animated, and

each one has a vast repository of moves to choose from.

Best of all, each of these characters is playable from the start, with no tedious unlocking required. This, however, is only in the offline arcade mode. In the campaign mode, which, oddly enough, is what the bulk of the game is about, only two characters are available initially. How one unlocks character stories is rather complicated. One has to first complete the game in the traditional arcade mode with their chosen character. Once this has been done, the character is then playable in the campaign mode. In campaign mode, you may then use your chosen character to enter the Iron Fist Tournament [Arena], in which you will play several matches that end with the boss battle against Azazel. Once this is completed, the character-specific prologue and ending movies are made available. You may then carry on with the campaign mode, playing through the main story.

This shift in focus to a more story-driven game is one of the most significant changes in the game. This change, however, doesn't detract from what has made *Tekken* so successful and the standard for 3D fighters. Not only are the playable characters well balanced, but the speed at which the game plays leads to pretty intense matches – especially

against adept players.

One lamentable aspect of this game happens to be the boss character, Azazel, who, much like *Tekken 3*'s True Orge, is unskilled, but is overly powerful (much like *Tekken 5*'s Jinpachi). This means that you either have to repeat the challenge multiple times or it's a completely unrewarding battle. Either way, the boss battle will be the least enjoyable encounter in the entire game. Besides this, *Tekken 6* is by far the most complete version of the game that Namco Bandai has ever released... and definitely one to pick up.

NAG

Neo Sibeko



- Plus**
- Excellent graphics
 - Expansive roster
 - Improved moves

- Minus**
- Overly powerful boss character
 - Convoluted story line

Bottom Line

Another worthwhile 'evolution' of the *Tekken* franchise with linear improvement on the already familiar, while introducing a story-driven game.

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XBOX 360™

The Incredible Machine Mega Pack

WHAT DO A MOUSE, a rocket, a pulley and a laser have in common? If you're a normal person, not much; but anyone who's had an experience with *The Incredible Machine* series will tell you: EVERYTHING.

TIM, as it's often lovingly referred to, is a series of puzzle games from towards the end of Sierra's "golden age." Every game in the series is much the same, with new iterations adding additional puzzle pieces, new levels and prettier visuals, but the basic premise remains the same: solve complex physics-based puzzles with seemingly unrelated objects. Many of the objects in the game are common household goods, like wheels of cheese, electric can openers, washing baskets and tennis balls, but the game is not without its collection of strange, sci-fi bits and pieces, including gravity-reversing platforms, laser-powered wall sockets, and phaser guns. In addition, you'll get tons of various balls, containers, and explosives, as well as mechanical bits and pieces like cogs and conveyor belts.

In the game's regular mode, you play through a series of increasingly difficult puzzles. Each puzzle presents you with three things: a half-completed stage that you cannot modify; a goal (such as "light all of the rockets"); and a collection of objects that can be put into the stage. You can insert objects pretty much anywhere they'll fit, and most objects have a degree of customisation, whether it's simply rotating the object, extending it (as is the case with pipes and tubes), or

programming it (as is the case with egg timers and leaky buckets). In addition to the regular puzzle mode, there is also a mode in which you can freely build your own wacky contraption, as well as a two-player head-to-head mode, in which players take turns to put down objects on a shared stage in an attempt to complete the puzzle first.

Most of the early stages are pretty straightforward, and only really have one or two ways of solving the problem, but later stages are quite open ended in terms of which objects you use to complete the puzzle. You're also often given a number of red herring objects, but an inventive mind might find a way to use those objects in ways they were never intended. If there's one thing *TIM* excels at, it's making the player feel like an idiot. Sometimes the solutions are incredibly obvious, and just require an understanding of physics and timing; whereas other times, the solutions are so "out there", you'll look back at the completed puzzle and wonder how exactly you managed to wrap your head around it.

If you enjoy puzzle games, pulling out your hair in frustration and throwbacks to the good old days when game developers didn't need you to like them, you'll have an absolute blast with *The Incredible Machine*. The package that GOG offers contains four games from the series, but skips out on the earlier releases. If you're looking for the best all-round game in the collection, *TIM 3* is the way to go. **NAG**





FRUSTRATION

WHAT TO PLAY FIRST

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Blood and Water

Format: Graphic Novel | **Publisher:** Vertigo | **Writer:** Judd Winick
Artist: Tomm Coker | **Price:** R129.95

ADAM HELLER USED TO have it pretty good. Good grades, attractive girlfriend, star athlete. And then, it all went to hell. For the last few years, life for Adam has been a blur of anguish and pain, as his body began to succumb to a throng of illnesses - Hepatitis A, kidney failure, liver failure - and a collection of indications and side effects that turned the once popular Adam Heller into a virtual hermit who could only watch as his life slipped away. When the doctor told him he was dying, Adam almost laughed. But in spite of all of his ailments, Adam has two really good friends who have watched him slipping away and can't stand it anymore, and they're not going to let him go. But what can they do that the wonders of medical science can't? Well, they can turn him into a vampire, for one. *Blood and Water* is really one of those books you can't put down, and when you turn the last page, you'll find yourself thinking that you really wish there was more. Not that the story is incomplete in any way, but just because it is really that good!



Clive Burmeister



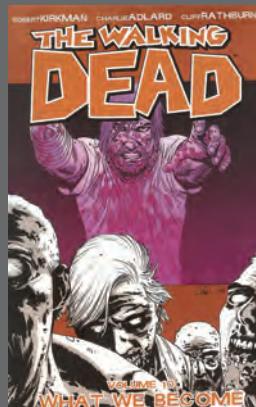
The Walking Dead Volume 10

Format: Graphic Novel | **Publisher:** Image Comics
Artists: Charlie Adlard, Cliff Rathburn | **Writer:** Robert Kirkman | **Price:** R140

THE ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE HAS happened; what's left of humanity is strewn across the world, left to fend for themselves or huddle together in an attempt to feel safe. Some have turned to barbarism - they choose to prey on the less well-armed humans for supplies, slaves, or sport. Everyone else is just trying to make it to the next day, and some are willing to do anything to ensure that happens.

The Walking Dead is a series of comics first published in 2004, and is now on its 66th issue. The series was created by writer Robert Kirkman and artist Tony Moore, who was replaced by Charlie Adlard from issue #7. Kirkman's writing style is straightforward: his characters speak about the mundane as often as the extreme. This brings a sense of reality to the series that is enforced by equally believable situations, and his characters' reactions to those situations. The often-depressing world Kirkman has created is bolstered by the black and white artwork; Adlard's mix of clean and grungy line work is perfectly for this series.

If you enjoy post zombie apocalypse films like *28 Days Later* and *Land of the Dead*, you'll love *The Walking Dead*. It says as much about humanity as it does about zombies, but despite being an intelligent series, it's in no way short on action.



Geoff Burrows

Doctor Voodoo: Avenger of the Supernatural #1

Format: Comic Series | **Publisher:** Marvel
Writer: Rick Remender | **Artist:** Jeffe Palo | **Price:** R36.50

THE MYSTERIOUS AND ANCIENT artefact, known as The Eye of Agamotto, has chosen a new magician to replace Doctor Strange as the world's Sorcerer Supreme; and to everyone's surprise, that replacement is Brother Voodoo. Guided by the Eye's vast powers, and trained by Doctor Strange in his new responsibilities, Jericho Drumm takes to the job of Sorcerer Supreme with zeal, calling himself Doctor Voodoo as he settles into his new role. But the pressures and perils, which weighed heavily on Stephen Strange's life for so long, are something not to be taken lightly, and soon Doctor Voodoo begins to understand the extreme burden of his newly appointed title, as he struggles to avert a pending disaster. Even though the Brother Voodoo character has been around for more than thirty years, and has appeared alongside all the main Marvel characters at one time or another, taking on the role of Dr Strange would be a challenge for most characters. So far, however, the comic looks to be 'keeping the same type of feel' that made the Dr Strange titles a success.

Clive Burmeister



Kill Audio #1

Format: Comic Miniseries | **Publisher:** Boom! Studios | **Writers:** Sanchez / Echert | **Artist:** Mr. Sheldon | **Price:** R43.50

WHEN YOU PICK UP a copy of *Kill Audio* from the shelf, you're probably expecting something slightly off the wall, a little crazy, and maybe, if you're familiar with some of the other works by creator Claudio Sanchez, you may be expecting a comic that you'll really enjoy. But then you read it, and it feels like you're being slapped in the face with a wet slug by a giant chicken talking 'gangsta-style'. And then you read it again. And maybe again just to be sure. *Kill Audio* is a comic so fresh and new it will take your breath away. The dialogue is something akin to "Clerks" on a really messed up trip; the artwork is insanely incomparable to anything that floods the comic shelves these days, with mad visuals that'll have you shuddering internally while simultaneously dying to see the next page. Sanchez bases the main character on himself, an immortal midget with an attitude (the character, not Sanchez, although...), and tells the story of this crazy little guy's journey for his purpose in Sight and Sound, with a rather odd group of companions who together face some nutty situations in their adventure.



Clive Burmeister

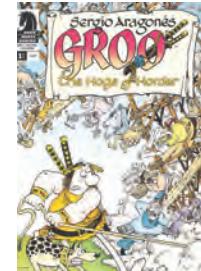


Sergio Aragones' Groo: The Hogs of Horder #1

Format: Comic Miniseries | **Publisher:** Dark Horse | **Writer:** Mark Evanier | **Artist:** Sergio Aragones | **Price:** R34.95

GROO IS BACK, AND he's as incompetent as ever - a clumsy and destructive force that sets a spiral of catastrophic events into motion. And even though it is usually his rumbling belly that decides his destination, Groo finds himself thinking of more than just the pleasures of battle and food, when he gets caught up in the political pandemonium that surrounds him, as he and his charming and loveable hound, Rufferto (who is incidentally the brains of the duo), travel to Horder. If you've never read a *Groo* comic before, think of it as an incredibly fun book, stuffed full of laughs, with a main character something like Conan crossed with Mr. Bean, and all brought together by a superb team whose fantastic illustration and hilarious writing make it one of the funniest comics around. And if you have read some in the past, well, then you're probably already grabbing a copy to see what disasters Groo can bring about this time.

Clive Burmeister



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Acer releases 3D laptop

EQUIPPED WITH A 3D screen and glasses, Acer's Aspire 5738 DG uses TriDef 3D technology to deliver a 3D multimedia experience to game and movie enthusiasts. The notebook features a 15.6-inch Acer CineCrystal HD display coated with a special 3D film, which clings to the panel pixel by pixel, enabling the LCD to deliver a 3D image. The TriDef software suite includes a Media Player for playback of videos and photos in 3D, and a TriDef Ignition tool to enable 2D to 3D conversion for games and applications supporting DirectX 9 and above. The 5738 DG can also be used as a traditional laptop, by turning the 3D mode off.

Local Quake Live server

Internet Solutions has launched a locally hosted Quake Live gaming server.

"Quake Live is one of the leading, global browser-based gaming experiences, so we are very proud to host the only game server of this kind in South Africa," says Davin Hansen, Gaming Services Manager at Internet Solutions.

"Through this agreement to host the game server locally, we are able to offer SA gamers lower latency and higher connectivity speeds, as well as the opportunity to utilise their local data bundle to participate in the live gaming experience, drastically reducing the costs involved," explains Hansen. "Overall the total gaming experience will be much more enjoyable than trying to play off an internationally hosted server."

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NAG Awards

DREAM MACHINE: We have a dream. That only the best hardware gets this hot chick, waving her derriere in the air like she just don't care.

HARDWARE: Ever wonder why it's called hardware? If something has this award, then someone got hard for the ware.



AMD 2010

Roadmap

AMD recently announced new details on its platform roadmap for 2010.

- "Danube" – The next AMD mainstream notebook platform featuring the first AMD mobile quad-core processors, "Danube" is expected to offer seven or more hours of battery life;
- "Nile" – The third-generation AMD ultrathin notebook platform, designed to offer seven or more hours of battery life;
- "San Marino" and "Maranello" – Two new DDR3-based server platforms designed for the volume server market. "Maranello," with the 8- and 12-core "Magny-Cours" processors, will represent the beginning of unprecedented leaps in performance-per-watt for AMD Opteron processors, while "San Marino" will offer new levels of value and power efficiency for the rapidly growing Web and Cloud Computing segment; and
- "Leo" – The next-generation enthusiast-class desktop PC platform with the industry's first six-core desktop CPU, expected to deliver the ultimate performance for immersive gaming with support for DirectX 11 graphics and ATI Eyefinity Technology. The 2011 overview includes "Zambezi," an enthusiast desktop processor with up to eight cores, featuring the first "Bulldozer" core.



Snippets

ASUS has released the **world's first motherboard to support the new USB 3.0 standard**, allowing data transfer rates approaching 600MB/sec. It also includes the latest generation SATA, which will support transfer speeds of up to 6Gb/sec.

Nokia will be closing the N-Gage games service in 2010. Going forward, all games available to Nokia handset owners will be shifted to its apps store, Ovi Store.

Leaked information on the next version of Nintendo's console suggests that the **Wii 2 will include a built-in Blu-ray drive** and support for 1080p games and movies.

Web Africa will be launching a **free gaming service** on 10 December. Customers with a Web Africa ADSL account will not utilise any of their monthly caps while gaming within the Web Africa network. Users should also look out for the Web Africa "FreeZone" icon, which indicates that the current Website is a "No cap utilisation" zone.

Hardware Scoring System

Our hardware scoring system is based on the reviewer's expert opinion. The scale is from 1 to 5 with no fractional values. Each number has a specific meaning, described below. Most products will score 3 or 4, with the occasional 5 or 2, and almost never 1. Note that a high price alone can never lower a score below 3.

- 5 **The stuff of Legends.** Buy it while you can, we already have.
- 4 **A good deal;** worth it if you're shopping for one.
- 3 **What you'd expect,** no problems. You might want to wait for a sale.
- 2 **This has some issues.** You should shop around for something else.
- 1 **The stuff of Nightmares.** You'll be sorry you got one, even for free.

Gaming Packs

Xbox 360 Starter Pack

This starter pack can store up to six games next to your console, along with your remote. It also comes with a complete cleaning kit for your CDs.



Wii 15 in 1 Pack

This pack contains a range of accessories that can be used with your Wii console. Also included are protection sleeves for your Nunchuck and Wii Remote, as well as replacement lanyards and controller-backs for added grip.



Console Toolkit

Shinobii sent us a very handy 19-piece toolkit that includes tools for use with almost every single console in existence. The tools are precision machined from heat-treated chrome vanadium steel and have a chrome finish.

www.shinobii.com



11 2010

Sources say that Microsoft's Project Natal is expected to be released worldwide in November 2010. Microsoft is planning to manufacture five million units for the first day of release, with a mix of console and camera plus solus SKUs expected.

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Garsfontein, PTA

OVERCLOCKING: BAD FOR YOU?

From: Gerdus Nieuwoudt

DEAR NAG, AFTER I read your article on the MSI Master Overclocking Arena 2009 and your news on the MSI Easy OC Technology (October Issue p70 and p80-p83) I couldn't help but wonder if I have been wrong all these years. My understanding of overclocking is that you push your hardware beyond the recommended operating parameters – essentially milking it for everything it has – to boost performance. But isn't overclocking detrimental to your hardware? Surely, pushing the limits of any form of equipment is dangerous. However, I don't quite know anymore. Not only can it be considered a sport (albeit expensive) with massive events dedicated to it, but increasingly it seems hardware manufacturers are using overclocking as a marketing strategy to increase sales. People seem to buy hardware more and more with the sole purpose of overclocking it. To be blunt: it seems that I missed the boat about overclocking and everything surrounding it. It would be great if you could shed some light on this and rid me of my confusion."

Neo: Overclocking has the potential of degrading or shortening the lifespan of your hardware. However, very few people keep hardware for such extended periods of time. If overclocking your graphics card shortens its lifespan, it will be from 15 years to 10 years at most. Needless to say, other factors determine the life cycle of your components – in particular cooling. Moderate overclocking for everyday use shouldn't be a problem for any hardware component worth overclocking. Competitive overclocking is a different matter. The risks are bigger, but the aim is completely different and the life cycle of any component is never an issue, as such users have a high hardware turnover anyway. All you need to know is that overclocking is not as dangerous as it is made to be – far from it.

COMMENTS AND A QUESTION

From: Xavier de Rauville

DEAR NAG, I JUST have a question and a few comments. First, the question. A friend of mine recently gave me his old computer, which I am thinking of restoring due to the fact that it is better than what I currently have. I soon noticed that the computer kept turning itself off after a minute or so. After some testing, I worked out that it kept turning off because it was protecting the CPU from overheating. To confirm, I went into the PC's BIOS as soon after the computer started as I could. The temperature read 80°C and quickly rose to 94°C at which point the PC turned off. By putting a piece of aluminium foil between the heat sink and CPU, I managed to make the temperature stop at 75°C. Another friend who was visiting at the time suggested that the high temperature was because the CPU fan was blowing air into the heat sink instead

of away from it. Does this sound right to you? Could the problem even be a faulty thermometer on the motherboard, causing the motherboard to protect the CPU from a threat that doesn't exist?

Lastly, the graphics card you chose in the Dream Machine is a GeForce 295, which is the most powerful GPU you can get at the moment. However, in an article I read written by a person I greatly respect (www.tweakguides.com/Hardcon09_6.html) it is mentioned that dual-graphics solutions tend to cause problems in games, the worst of which is micro-stuttering (www.pcgameshardware.de/aid,631668/Video-proof-Micro-stuttering-may-destroy-the-performance-gains-from-current-multi-GPU-technologies/Grafikkarte/Test/). Is this still an issue? If so, it might be a better option to use a single graphics solution, unless the Dream Machine will be primarily used for top 3DMark scores.."

Neo:

1. Remove the piece of foil you have inserted between the CPU and the heat sink. While DIY is encouraged when fixing your PC to some degree, that kind will only lead to damaged hardware. Get some reputable thermal paste (almost anything you can buy today is good enough) and clean the heat sink and CPU and re-apply a new layer, that should help the temperatures (provided the heat sink is not the problem). If it is, you may have to lap it to make the surface smooth again or buy a new heat sink. Your overheating issues are not caused by the direction at which the air is blown.
2. Micro-stuttering is something that affected the Radeon HD 3870X2 in particular, and 3-Way SLI with early driver sets. This was alleviated greatly in the HD 4000 series and currently isn't an issue at all. This applies to NVIDIA cards as well. Neither the 9800GX2 nor the GTX 295 suffered from this. It is also worth noting that the article referenced is from February 2008 (its 18 months old at the least); and as you know, there's been many driver revisions and newer hardware since then. As it stands, the GTX 295 offers the best frame rates of any graphics card across the board (this will change with the HD 5970) and we can say that stuttering is a thing of the past.

INTERNET ON THE PS3

From: mlindoz11

I'M A NEW PS3 Slim owner and I would like to use the network features on it. I have a PC with no Internet, but I'm planning on getting it. When I get it, how will I hook up the Internet to my PS3? What router must I buy and is it really free? Please help – your magazine rocks."

Adam: Taking advantage of the PS3's Internet connectivity really isn't as complicated as it initially seems. All you'll need is a router that either has Wi-Fi connectivity or one that has an available Ethernet port to connect to your PS3 – it all depends on which solution will be more practical for you, wired or wireless. Just make sure that you don't go for a modem that only has a USB port, otherwise you'll need a separate router in order to connect your PS3 to it.

If you go the Ethernet route, the PS3 will generally automatically detect your router and set itself up accordingly. If you connect it via a Wi-Fi router, all you'll need to do is to make sure that the PS3 is in range of the network, and then enter the WPA or WEP key of the router, and the rest of the settings will be taken care of automatically.

Using the Internet on your PS3 is free: you don't pay a fee for Web browsing or online gaming. Bear in mind, though, that depending on your Internet service provider and your means of connection (ADSL, 3G, or whatever it may be), you may still have to pay your ISP for the amount of data you transfer, or you might be subject to a limit on your total monthly data transfer. Your PS3 Internet access will also be subject to the same limitations. You'll also have free access to the PlayStation Store, where you'll be able to download game demos and patches free of charge. There are also full-version games and extra downloadable content packs for certain games available through the PlayStation Store, though these will have to be paid for separately using a credit card.

If you'd like our tech guru, Neo, to answer your hardware questions, send a mail to lauren.dasneves@tidemedia.co.za. There aren't any prizes for the letters we print, just simple and honest advice (that is, if we can even decipher the garbled e-mail we sometimes get). **NAG**





DICK MARCINKO

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Dream Machine

XAVIER DE RAUVILLE WROTE to us and asked this question about our Dream Machine.

"As for the Dream Machine, I see that you finally added headphones in the October issue. I also noticed that they are USB headphones. Doesn't this mean that the computer will use the headphone's sound device instead of the ASUS Xonar? If so, is the sound quality from the headphone sound device as good as if the ASUS Xonar were the sound synthesizer? Following from that, would there be any point in installing the ASUS Xonar?"

So, let's clarify that, shall we? We've included a headset for use at LAN parties and for situations where speakers are not suitable (for instance, late-night gaming and such). The Essence ST is essentially a stereo-only sound card, so the Logitech G35 headset would be used for surround-sound gaming more than anything else. Speakers would be used with the Xonar Essence ST or a more traditional headphone set. Since we're all hardcore gamers and this IS the ultimate gaming rig, it stands to reason that we would have both (speakers and headphones, that is) – just in case, you know.



Headphones

Logitech G35 Surround Sound
www.logitech.com



Processor

Intel Core i7 Extreme 975
www.intel.com



Motherboard

GIGABYTE GA-EX58-EXTREME
www.gigabyte.co.za



Graphics Card

ASUS EAH5870
<http://za.asus.com>



Memory

OCZ Triple Channel PC12800 DDR3
www.ocztechnology.com



Case

Cooler Master Cosmos S
www.coolermaster.com



Storage

Patriot Torqx 128GB SSD
www.patriotmemory.com



Power Supply

IKONIK Vulcan 1,200W PSU
www.ikonik.com



Sound

ASUS Xonar Essence ST
<http://za.asus.com>



Monitor

Samsung SyncMaster T260 LCD
www.samsung.co.za



Keyboard

Logitech G19
www.logitech.com



Mouse

Logitech G9x Laser
www.logitech.com



Cooling

Thermaltake BigWater 780
www.thermaltake.com



穩

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Dual Exchangeable
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• Expansion slots	7
• Form Factor	CEB / ATX / Micro ATX
• System fan (front)	1 x 12cm silent fan
• System fan (rear)	2 x 12cm blue LED illuminated fan
• I/O ports	1 x e-SATA/2 x USB 2.0/ 1 x IEEE1394/ 1 x Audio Set (AC'97/HD)



BY NEO SIBEKO

Platform Confusion

SPEAKING WITH OTHER ENTHUSIASTS over the last few months has been very interesting, to say the least. We looked forward to what Intel's LGA1156 platform would bring to the scene with great anticipation - especially after the incredible overclocking we saw from early engineering samples. While performance per clock was lower than that of the 1366 CPUs, the expected price of the platform was expected to make up for this. However, upon release of the P55, we found that there was not much for the enthusiasts at all. In fact, more than that, there isn't much that the P55 offers that we don't already have.

This makes for a very puzzling situation: not only does the platform offer zero performance benefits over the X58 platform, but it's not particularly cheap, either. For instance, the Core i7-870 we used in this month's versus feature retails for over R6,000, which is more than the price of the Core i7-950 and very close in price to the i7-960. Both of these CPUs are faster than the 870 out of the box, overclock significantly better and are available from just about every retailer. I still don't understand the purpose of the CPU at all in the desktop space.

Indeed, the platform, in theory, makes sense when you consider that the P55 integrates the drive controller, memory, PCI Express and USB control mechanisms in the CPU package, which leads to a significantly less complicated motherboard and platform as a result.

From this perspective, the P55 is attractive; especially with the integrated graphics processor that will be on the upcoming Core i3 CPUs. In essence, it makes it possible for Intel to sell a single-chip solution to its customers, and eventually to us, the end users, at significantly reduced prices. All this is great, no matter how you look at it. But the desktop parts currently available in the form of the i5-750, i7-860 and in particular the 870 are puzzling, to say the least.

Right now, I couldn't, in good faith, recommend buying an Intel Core i7-870 for any reason at all. There's absolutely nothing that makes this an attractive or remotely sensible purchase at all. As I discovered when trying to find out how cheaply a high-end gaming machine could be put together for, the i7-870 system ended up costing the same as an X58 system using a 950 CPU. With the X58 system, however, you can get full, dual PCI Express 16x lanes and triple-channel memory support. The motherboards are, in general, more expensive, but it's also true that a high-end P55-based board usually costs more than a mid-range X58 motherboard with the exact same

features (and more times than not more).

AMD is not exempt from this, it seems. While the CPUs from the company are cheap - to the point of being ridiculous at times - there are many product overlaps that make buying the right CPU particularly challenging. For instance, the Phenom II X2 550 is often a better CPU than the X3 720. The additional core on the 720 has virtually no performance benefits, yet it costs more than the 550. And, as the numbering system suggests, it's the better part.

Another puzzling aspect of the AMD platforms would be why there is continued support for DDR2 memory, which currently costs more per gigabyte than DDR3. While backwards compatibility with AM2+ platforms is appreciated, there's no incentive to buy DDR2. And the limited upgrade path of AM2+ motherboards makes it even less sensible to invest in the old memory type. While this may turn out to be untrue, it is currently said that AMD's six-core Thuban CPUs are unlikely to have an IMC capable of using DDR2 memory, which automatically makes them AM3-only.

All of this makes this a very difficult time to upgrade, because one can find oneself buying into a platform that has a limited future (or one that costs more than it should).

At the end of 2009, there are only two platforms that should be considered as sensible upgrade paths, and they are the X58 from Intel and the 790/AM3 from AMD. There just isn't a reason to buy anything else - or, at the very least, I have yet to find one. **NAG**

"This makes for a very puzzling situation: **not only does the platform offer zero performance benefits over the X58 platform, but it's not particularly cheap, either."**

SKULL CANDY

dB COLLECTION

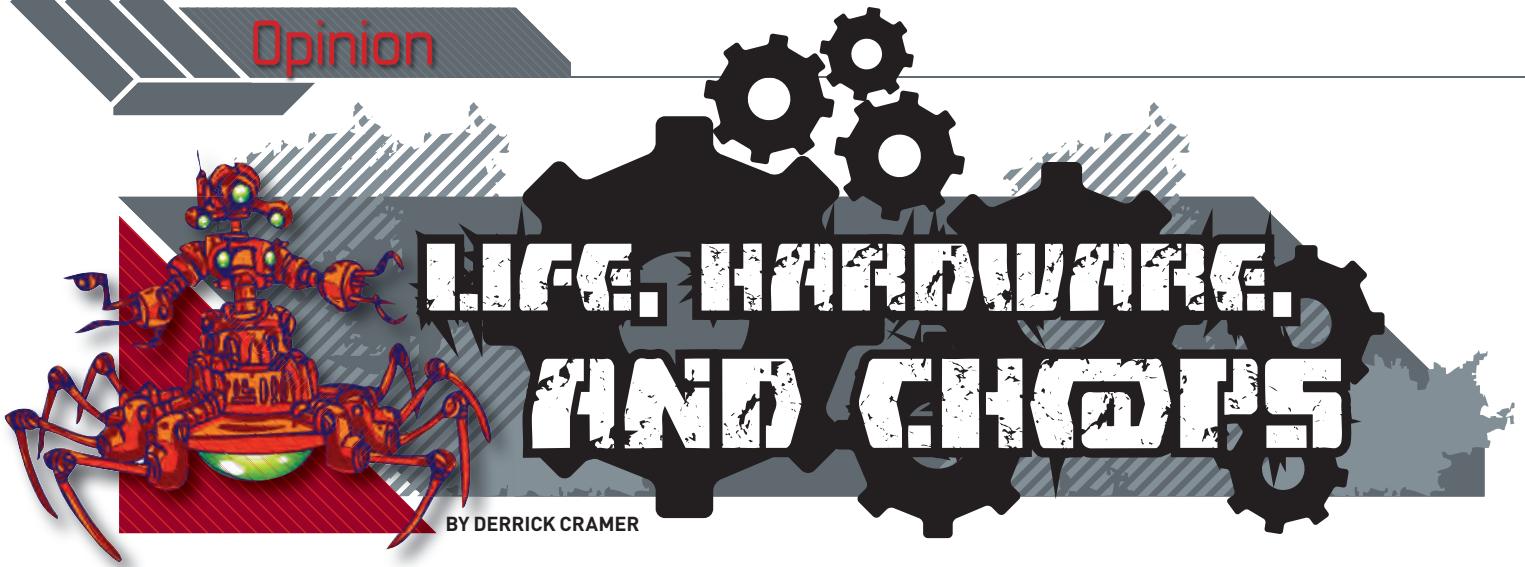
A pair of mini-subwoofers against your skull makes the bass feel like a swarm attack by the renegades of funk, soldiers of Jah, hip-hop nation, all at once. So, no. Skullcrusher is not just a clever name.



sammy Carlson
SKULLCANDY.COM

PHOTOS: Quang Le

Contact Info:
Luks Brands
info@luksbrands.com



LUGG, HARDWARE, HAND CHOCKS

BY DERRICK CRAMER

Dear Santa...

THE FESTIVE SEASON WILL almost be in full swing by the time you read this. And what better way to start it off than to share with you all my Christmas hardware wish list. Full of hardware old and new, get your parents/spouse to read this once you're done, and follow it up with a few weeks of your best behaviour. And just maybe Santa will lay a few boxes under your tree.

Seagate Barracuda 1TB Hard Drive: Who doesn't need more space nowadays? Now more than ever, PCs are an all-in-one media centre with most people looking to back up their precious DVDs and music collections. And with the price of 1TB drives at a record low, space has never been more affordable. So, when great aunt Muriel buys you the complete box set of *CSI: Miami*, you have somewhere to store it.

OCZ Neural Impulse Actuator: Who wouldn't want to frag their opponents using mind bullets? Okay, so it's not actually controlling your in-game avatar with mind power, but it's the closest consumers will get for a long time to come. And what better way to impress great aunt Muriel? If anything, it will give her stories to tell the people at the old-age home. It's the OCZ N.I.A.

Sennheiser HD 555 Headphones: With great specials on all Sennheiser products at the moment, you'd be a fool to pass this one up. Gaming-orientated headphones will never touch a good set of brand-name cans. Offering great sound, comfort, and above all sound quality; the HD 555s should be any sound lover's choice. Great. Aunt Muriel approves.

Windows 7: If you haven't yet experienced the joy that Windows 7 brings, you need to step out of the dark ages. After all, what would you do with your shiny, new hardware if you had no OS to run it on? Get rid of Windows XP and embrace the future. Windows 7 gets two thumbs and a set of false teeth up from great aunt Muriel.

Samsung 2494HS LCD: If you don't own a full-HD screen yet (shame on you!), then this should be at the top of your list. HD is the way forward, and when a screen comes along at a price point aimed at the masses, with this resolution, picture quality, and build quality, you can't help but feel all warm inside. Samsung

cares about its customers. The 2494HS is proof. Great. Aunt Muriel's T260 is too big anyway.

ROCCAT Kone Gaming Mouse: If you're reading this column, chances are that you own a gaming mouse sporting either Logitech or Razer logos. I've owned mice from both, and let me tell you: they are good but BORING! Everyone has one of the above. What happened to standing out in the crowd? The Kone is on par, feature-wise, with the big players, and looks so damn sexy - a match made in heaven. The Kone will make great aunt Muriel think twice about upgrading her MX518.

ASUS BR-04B2T Blu-ray Drive: A good drive at a decent price. Blu-ray is the next big thing. Watching full-HD movies on your new 2494HS is a magical experience. The sound from your HD 555s will blow your mind, and later you can back up the movie onto your Seagate Barracuda 1TB hard drive, so that even when great aunt Muriel uses your discs as Frisbees at the family braai, you can watch on with peace of mind.

Well, that brings an end to the wish list. I hope you took notes and are already dropping the hints. Even if you don't get what you asked for, don't hate Santa too much - great aunt Muriel will take care of him for you. I'll see you all in 2010. Until then, have a very merry Christmas and a rocking New Year! **NAG**

“Get rid of Windows XP and
embrace the future. **Windows 7**
gets two thumbs and a set of false
teeth up from great aunt Muriel”



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PRICE VERSUS PERFORMANCE

Intel versus AMD (Part 1)

2009 HAS BEEN A very interesting year in computing. Not only were new chipsets and processors introduced, but we have a new DirectX API, new-generation graphics processors, and a new operating system with tighter integration with these technologies. 2010 is going to be one of the most interesting years in computing as a whole, especially in terms of gaming innovations. Hopefully prices will drop, which will allow more people access to higher-performance hardware than ever before.

Intel's P55 platform has been released and it, unlike the X58 platform, is a more appropriate competitor to the AMD Phenom II range - if only because of pricing (save for the i7-870 CPU). With both platforms targeting the same market, we wanted to find out exactly what kind of gaming performance one can expect

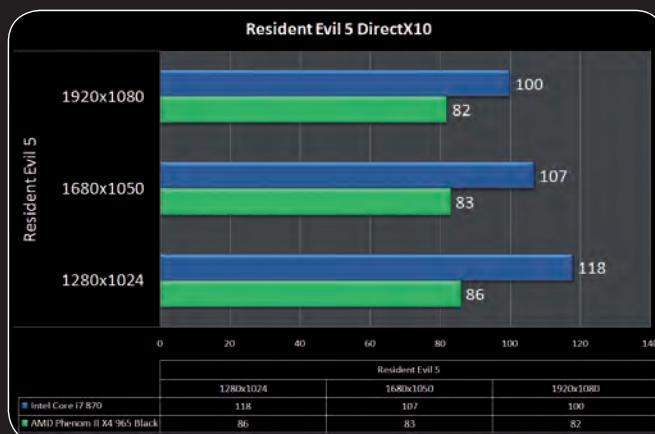
Test Configurations	
CPU	AMD Phenom II X4 965 Black
Motherboard	GIGABYTE 790FXT-UD5
Memory	2 x 1GB DDR3 1,600MHz CL8
Graphics Card	ASUS Radeon EAH5870
Operating System	Windows 7 Ultimate 64-bit
Display Driver	Catalyst 9.10 WHQL
Total Cost (in USD)	\$898
	Intel Core i7-870
	ASUS Maximus III Formula
	2 x 1GB DDR3 1,600MHz CL8
	ASUS Radeon EAH5870
	Windows 7 Ultimate 64-bit
	Catalyst 9.10 WHQL
	\$1,303

with the configurations available today, without going the X58 route, which can be very costly even after almost a year on the market. This in itself presented us with a problem because the i7-870 CPU, on a platform that is supposed to

be cheaper than the high-end X58, actually costs more than the Intel Core i7-950 CPU, which is a better CPU in every conceivable way. However, that is an issue for our i7 range CPU reviews. Right now, we are looking at complete systems,

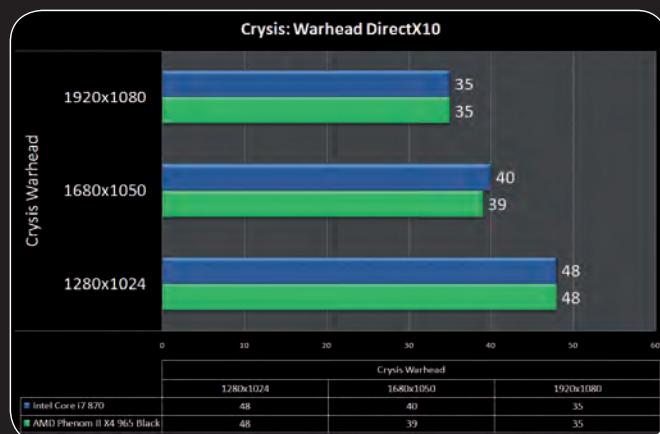
the associated costs, and the performance of each.

The P55 chipset, with its associated technologies and component integration, is a much better match (or competitor) for the AMD Phenom II. This is in terms of



RESIDENT EVIL 5

Despite being multi-platform, this game looks beautiful with its DirectX 10 rendering path with superior lighting and very detailed textures. The Intel platform proved its superiority and 'recorded' over 100 frames per second at every resolution tested. This game is CPU-bound on the AMD platform, and frame rates were 'uniform' regardless of resolution.



CRYYSIS WARHEAD

This title is by far the most taxing benchmark in this test. Even after all this time, it is still graphics processor-bound. There was no difference between the two platforms whatsoever.

price (the Core i7-870 CPU excluded) and mechanically as well.

- AMD AM3 CPUs have a relatively low Northbridge (NB) frequency (2,000MHz reference) when compared with the X58 chipset-supporting CPUs. This applies to the Lynnfield CPUs as well to some degree (P55, LGA1156 platform), which have an uncore (it serves the same purpose as NB frequency) rate of 2,400MHz. It's better than that of the AMD platform, but still lower than that of the X58 platform. The NB frequency on the AMD CPUs, however, can be increased through an unlocked NB multiplier (like on the X58 platform - but this doesn't hold true for the P55).

- Both platforms use a dual-channel 128-bit DDR3 IMC (integrated memory controller). AMD's controller supports DDR2 as well for backwards compatibility with AM2+ motherboards (which is partially responsible for some memory performance inefficiencies when compared to the Lynnfield CPUs). However, AMD's IMC has a nice Un-ganged and Ganged mode option.

- In terms of price, the highest-end AMD part costs about the same as the lowest-end Intel Lynnfield CPU. Motherboard pricing at the high end is the closest it's ever been in years for directly competing platforms.

- Both platforms' CPUs are faster than the previous-generation high-end Intel X48/Intel Core 2 Extreme X9650 configuration.



UNREAL TOURNAMENT III

The mighty Unreal Engine 3 at work here. This title, much like *Resident Evil 5*, is CPU-bound at the lowest resolution, but as the frame rates increase, the load shifts to the graphics processor. The Intel platform advantage starts at 42fps at the highest resolution to zero at 1,920 x 1,080. Both systems delivered performance higher than you'd ever need (regardless of the settings used).



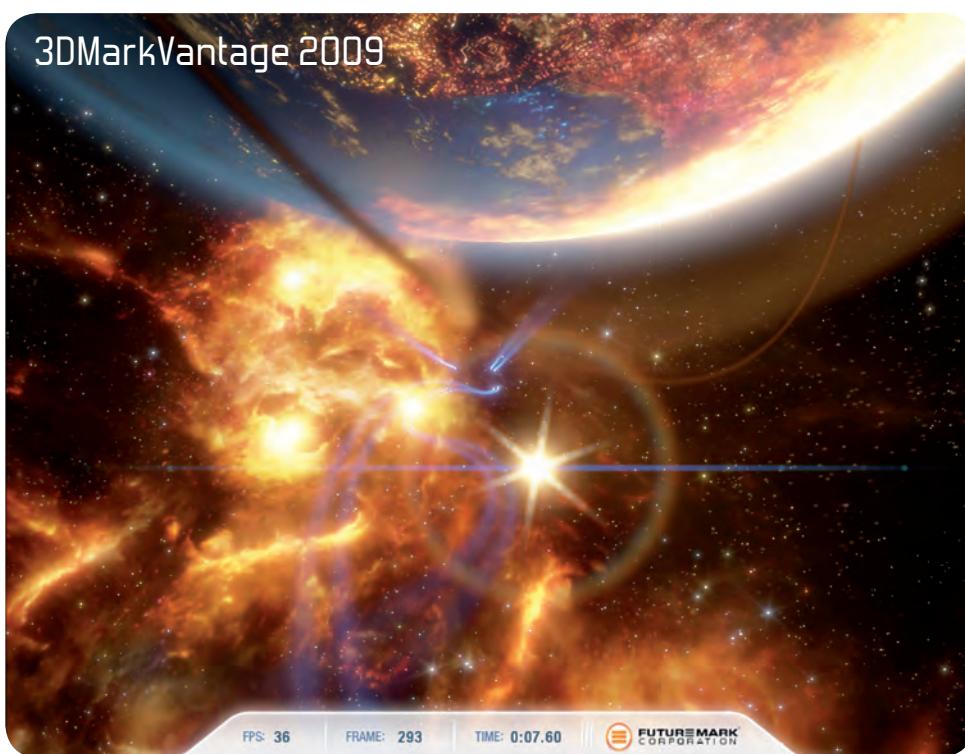
PT BOATS: KNIGHTS OF THE SEA

This was one of the first DirectX 10-capable benchmarks to be released. It hasn't aged with grace despite the API it uses, but the water effects still look incredible. The difference in performance between the systems was negligible, but the Intel system was faster – even though it was by 3fps at most.

TESTING METHODOLOGY

- In total, we used eight benchmarks, with resolutions scaling from 1,280 x 1,024 to the full-HD resolution of 1,920 x 1,080, with 1,680 x 1,050 22-inch LCD resolutions included as well. All other resolutions will likely fall somewhere in between these, and one can easily extrapolate what the performance would be with any other screen size from these results.
- Synthetic benchmarks are given exactly as they were reported by the test suite, while game benchmarks are given in frames per second rounded down to the nearest 'whole' number.
- All game tests were run at their maximum in-game quality settings with 4x MSAA, except for *Unreal Tournament III* (which doesn't support multi-sampling AA) and *Crysis Warhead* (which, even today, is too taxing for most single-GPU-powered systems when AA is applied). [This applies to the Radeon HD 5870 as well.]
- The results, in a way, present the worst-case scenario as far as frame rates are concerned. This is because after every benchmark, the computer was rebooted. [The tests were not run three times so that the game was cached and the best result presented.] Most people don't load a level three times before they start playing. One has to play through the hard drive 'thrashing' more times than not and this is a more honest representation than looped benchmarks.

3DMarkVantage 2009



- Turbo was enabled on the Core i7-870.
- We consider anything rendered at 35fps and higher playable. Obviously, even higher frame rates are appreciated, but this, for the vast majority of people, is only up until the 50fps mark [at which point anything higher is meaningless].

CONCLUSION:

Well, there you have it: eight benchmarks and the results speak for themselves. The Core i7-based configuration

was marginally faster than the AMD-based system. However, that was expected. The whole point was to find out how much faster either machine would be and if the additional cost involved was worth it in the end. With the Core i7-870 winning all the benchmarks, the answer is simple: No, the price premium is not worth it. If you look at the pricing of both machines, it might not be obvious. But considering that you can buy the Phenom II X4 965 CPU, 4GB of RAM and the 790FXT-UD5 motherboard for less than what the Core i7-870

CPU alone will set you back, we would go for the AMD system in a heartbeat. This might not hold true if the Intel system used the more sensible and affordable Intel Core i7-860 CPU [which is significantly less at about half the retail price of the 870, but clocked 133MHz lower]. At a frequency of 133MHz less, the results change, as the Phenom II X4 965 matches this configuration [with the i7-860 CPU]. And as a result, it's only slightly cheaper. So, that might be a slightly harder decision to make as to which platform offers better value.

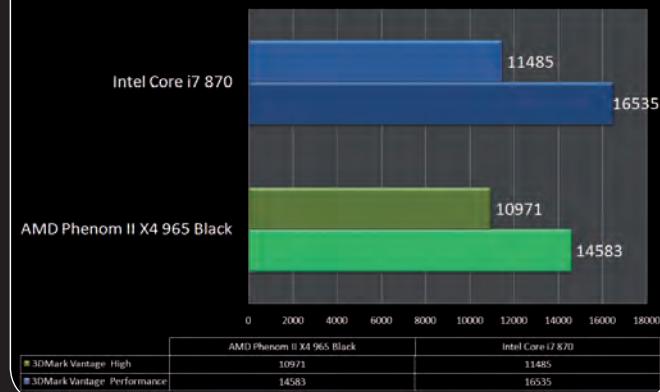
3DMark 06 DirectX9



3DMARK 06

There's not much to say about this synthetic benchmark. Once heavily graphics processor-bound, it's now host CPU-bound. The Intel platform was again ahead by a sizeable margin thanks to Hyper-Threading technology, which boosted the CPU tests significantly.

3DMark Vantage DirectX10



3DMARK VANTAGE

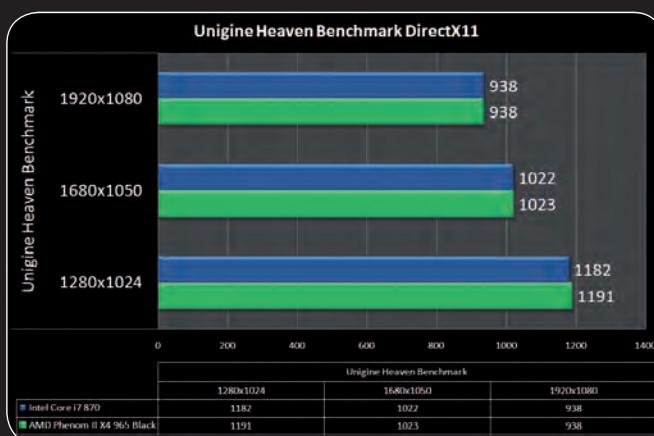
The latest benchmark from Futuremark uses DirectX 10 code exclusively and is the best-looking benchmark from an artistic and technological point of view. Hyper-Threading once again lent a hand in giving the Intel platform the win with a significant advantage when using the Performance profile and with the High profile [although the margin was significantly smaller].



With that said, both platforms offer some interesting overclocking headroom, but the Intel CPUs are significantly better with air-cooling. The Phenom II X4 965 CPU will reach its limit at 3.8GHz while the Core i7-870 will reach a healthy 4.2GHz, where it will perform even better, besting the i7-topping 975 Extreme Edition CPU by quite a healthy margin. Another benefit of the Intel platform is that it features both SLI and CrossFire capability. This has a direct bearing on the motherboards costing more, but it's nice to have that option

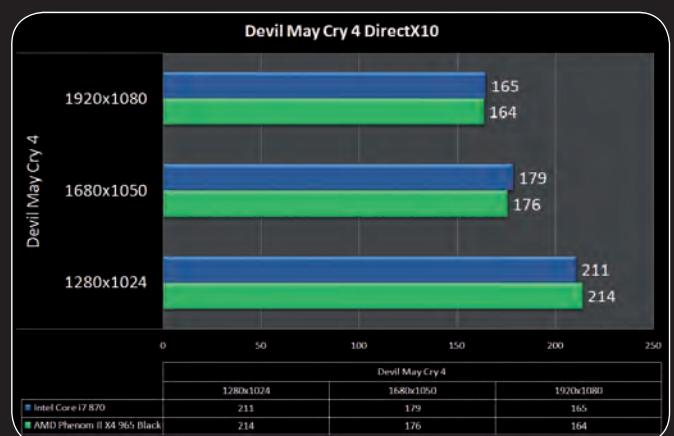
for those willing to pay the price premium. On the AMD system, you will have to choose between CrossFire and SLI. SLI-capable 980a boards are flaky at best, so you're largely limited to CrossFire, regardless of how much money you are willing to spend on the motherboard.

At the end of Part 1, the AMD platform is the winner, as it provides solid performance at an incredible price. Next time, we will be comparing the Phenom II X4 955 Black Edition to the Intel Core i7-750 CPU using the NVIDIA GeForce GTX 275 graphics processor. **NAG**



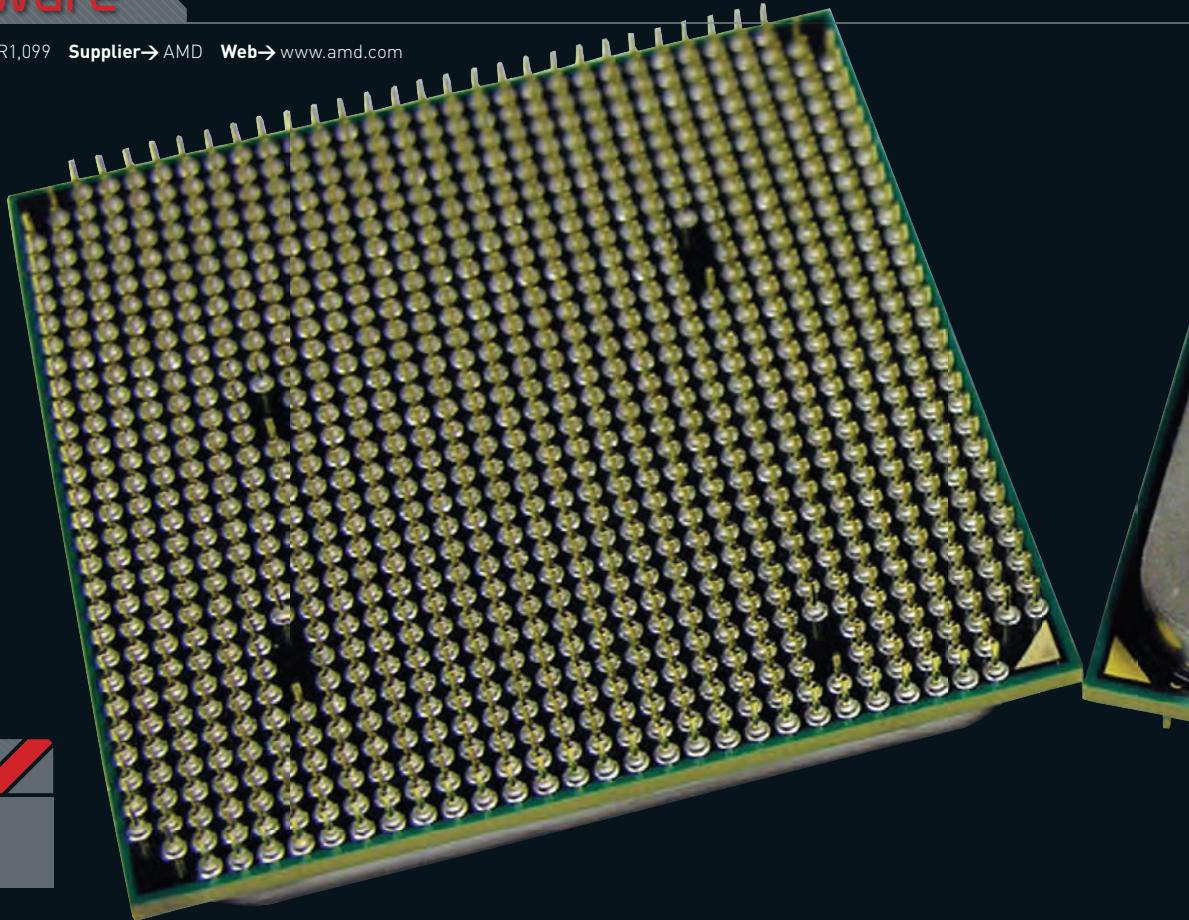
UNIGINE HEAVEN BENCHMARK

This new DirectX 11 benchmark, which shows off the new tessellation engine in the API and other advanced lighting effects, is almost entirely GPU-bound. The AMD system seemed to be able to deal better with this benchmark, as it slightly edged ahead of the Intel system. Once again, we must state that the difference in score was insignificant for the most part.



DEVIL MAY CRY 4

This is a slightly older title, but still looks good in some parts. It is relatively light on the system and the frame rates are ridiculously high. The AMD system started out with a small lead, which it conceded to the Intel system at the higher resolutions. But the difference was never more than 3fps either way, and as such, the two platforms were equals in this title.



Specifications

Frequency: 3.1GHz
Cores: 2 (45nm)
Cache: 8MB total

AMD Phenom II X2 550 Black Edition

THE CPU WARS BETWEEN Intel and AMD have been heating up. This is especially true in the low- and very high-end segments. We've already seen some incredible numbers from Intel's upcoming Core i9 CPU, which has shattered just about every record out there as far as performance is concerned. While these records are not currently published, as the retail parts are only due around March or so next year, the numbers have calmed the overclocking scene in anticipation for what awaits us next year for the X58 motherboards.

On the other hand, not to be outdone, we have seen - in the overclocking scene - preliminary results of AMD's G1 platform with their Magny-Cores CPUs in a two-socket configuration with a total of 24 threads. Indeed, that means AMD will be ready to challenge Intel's upcoming six-core, 12-thread i9 with their six-core Thuban CPU and their 12-core Magny-Cores CPU, which is obviously finalised and in production to some degree.

2010 will definitely be a very interesting year, and we will be watching closely what happens between these two semiconductor firms.

That, however, will likely only affect power users and those with very deep pockets. For the rest of us, CPUs such as the Phenom II X2 550 present the best value in computing we have had in years. It's arguably the cheapest and

fastest dual-core processor you can buy today - second only to the 555. This CPU features incredible value, as it is faster than similarly priced Intel CPUs; and best of all, it's on a modern platform, which has a future (unlike the LGA775, which has effectively reached EOL as far as chipsets and higher-specification parts are concerned).

This is a very important factor in making purchasing decisions, as the AM3 platform caters for CPUs as cheap as R670 (in the Athlon II CPUs), to the platform-topping Phenom II X4 965 at over R2,600. What makes the Phenom II X2 550 that much more impressive is that it overclocks just as well as the X4 CPUs, features the same amount of cache at 6MB L3, and is unlocked for both the Northbridge and CPU frequency.

Performance-wise, it's exactly what one would expect, 'beating out' the older AMD Phenom II X4 940 BE CPU in applications that are not multi-threaded, but falling short in media encoding and other multi-threaded synthetic programs. For most games, however, the performance will not be noticeable; and given the retail price of just over R1,000, it's hard to fault this CPU.

For anyone looking for a cheap upgrade from a single-core CPU or the older Phenom CPUs, this is a CPU that is definitely worth considering - especially with its native compatibility with select

AM2/AM2+ motherboards.

One of the key benefits of having a dual-core CPU based on the Deneb core is that the TDP is relatively low at 80W. This may not mean much to most people, but it has a direct bearing on how much heat the CPU produces. In the case of the 550, it was not only cooler than all the other X4 CPUs we had tested, but even when overclocked to 3.6GHz, load temperatures never exceeded 47°C. This temperature reading is incredible, considering that we were using a relatively old AMD aftermarket cooler.

To put the Phenom II X2 550's performance in perspective, it achieved the same in-game frame rates as the Core 2 Duo E8400 - which makes it rather quick. This may be one of the few times in a long time where it may be worth switching from an Intel platform to an AMD platform - if only for the 'longevity' of the AM3 platform compared to the LGA775 platform.

SECRET WEAPON

We would have been satisfied with the performance of the Phenom II X2 550 BE, but this CPU happens to have a secret weapon, and that is the ability to switch from a dual-core CPU to its original quad-core state. That's right: while this is not a new feature and certainly not one promised by AMD, there exists a number of motherboard and CPU combinations



that allow X2 and X3 CPUs to enable all the disabled cores.

The Phenom II X2 550 BE CPU in combination with the best AM3 motherboard around (the GIGABYTE MA-790FXT-UD5) 'allowed' this CPU to unlock two further cores, which the system registered as a new Phenom II X4 B50. We did some testing and the CPU had four threads working, and performance numbers increased accordingly.

Given that the 550 is a Black Edition CPU, it has an unlocked multiplier that allowed us to effectively turn the CPU into a Phenom II X4 965 Black Edition CPU; which, if you look back, we had rated as the best CPU ever by AMD. Best of all, with the cores unlocked, to reach 3.4GHz one need not adjust any voltages or anything else other than the CPU multiplier.

This, to us, is probably the Phenom II

X2's biggest selling point: the possibility of being able to turn your budget CPU into a top-of-the-range part, costing almost three times as much, makes the 550 worth buying. Not only did we successfully unlock the CPU, but we were also able to reach an impressive 3.8GHz using an air cooler, which yielded better results than any CPU you can buy for the LGA1156 platform and, obviously, the AM3 platform. The only CPUs to best our unlocked B50 are the Intel Core i7-950 and 'higher' CPUs.

As far as value is concerned, there just isn't anything on the market that comes close to the Phenom II X2 550/555 CPU. If we had to build an AMD-based system, this would be the CPU of choice - without question.

Another great CPU from AMD; maybe even the best yet in terms of value. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko



Bottom Line

Easily the most appealing CPU in AMD's entire line-up.

Plus

- + Performance
- + Incredible overclocking headroom

Minus

- Nothing



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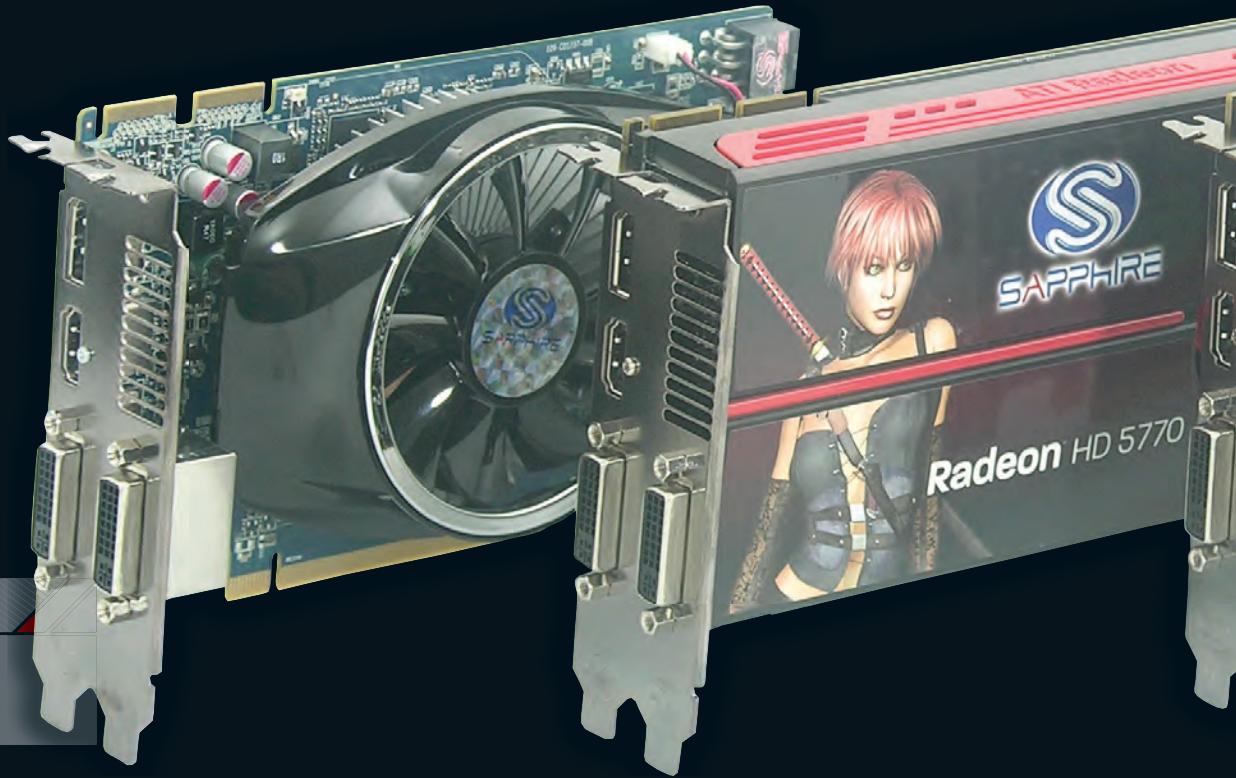
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Specifications

API Support: DirectX 11, OpenCL 1.0, OpenGL 3.X
Interface: PCI-E 2.0
Core: TSMC 40nm

SAPPHIRE Radeon HD 5000 Series

AMD HAS REALLY DONE well with the launch of the Radeon 5000 series of graphics cards. Not only did they release the new range of GPUs in a timely manner, but they also managed to release an entire family, from top to bottom, at the same time (or, at least, in the same month).

This hardly ever happens in the graphics card industry and has not happened since the R3XX launch many years ago.

While we are fully aware that the Evergreen (RV870) GPU powering the 5870 is the fastest and most advanced GPU on the market today, that power comes at a price (which is usually just too much for most people). With that said, just because people's pockets are not deep enough, doesn't mean they have to miss out on the latest DirectX 11 goodness. In fact, DirectX 11-capable graphics cards from AMD, such as the 5750, can now be bought for as little as R1,399 locally. Which is a little steep perhaps, given that the MSRP is \$102 to \$129, but even at this price, the performance that the card delivers is incredible, and, most importantly, it's DirectX 11-compliant. This is true for the Radeon 5770 as well, which is even faster. It's slightly slower than the outgoing Radeon 4890 and costs about the same. But one has to keep in mind that the drivers are likely to get better and the titles that are capable of using DirectX

11 features will only get faster, while the performance of the 4000 series cards will only get worse.

The 5850 graphics card is obviously the second fastest graphics card in the 5000 series, and as such, should be the card to strike the perfect balance between performance and price. However, TSMC has been having issues with the 40nm process, which the 5000 series is manufactured on. These yield issues have not only made the 5870 virtually impossible to buy [rumours have it that there's only about 20,000 5870 graphics cards on the market], but as such, has caused AMD to increase the MSRP of the 5850 by \$20. This puts the card in a precarious position, as it is noticeably slower than the 5870, but is closing in on in terms of price.

Still, given that it's virtually impossible to buy a 5870, among these three graphics cards, there is an upgrade for most people. Technically, these parts are identical to the 5870, just scaled appropriately in terms of stream processor count, the number of render outputs, and texture units. The 5700 cards feature a 128-bit bus, which is narrow by today's standards - even with GDDR5 memory - but with better memory bandwidth efficiency, the cards manage to do more with less.

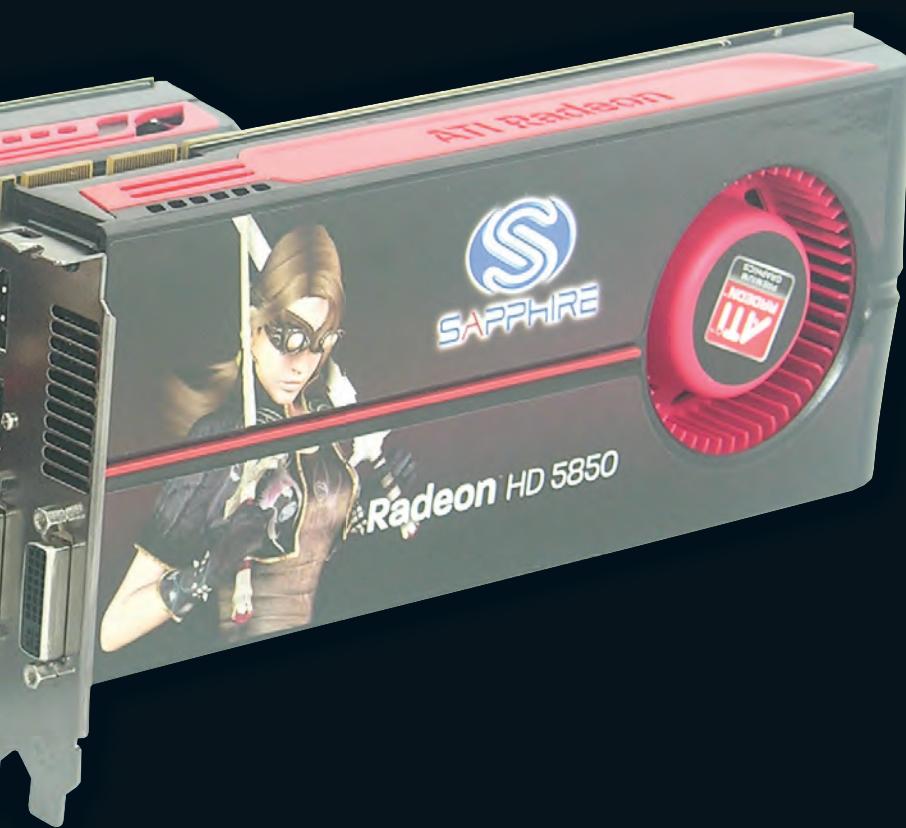
Most of the innovation in the new 5000 series is actually due to being DirectX 11-compliant, and not much else.

However, that doesn't mean ATI has not done some impressive engineering. As many of you are aware, tessellation has always been a high priority for ATI, and as such, the new 5000 series cards are particularly adept at this.

This is important. It will be a much-used feature in DirectX 11 titles, and being efficient at this high-order surface-rendering techniques will not only make the 5000 series faster than the equivalent DirectX 10/10.1 parts, but it will also make the titles look better.

The greatest thing about the new 5000 series, however, is CrossFire scaling. This should be of interest to many gamers on a budget, because the 5750 in CrossFire manages to outperform a single 5870 graphics card (for the most part). That's right: for less than R3,000 you can get performance that matches and often exceeds that of a 5870, which currently retails for as much as R5,800 [if you can find one, in the first place]. This advantage over a single 5870 is even more pronounced with the 5770 graphics cards, which should also be cheaper than a single 5870 graphics card.

Besides the performance of the cards, the power consumption figures are impressive, as are the very low idle temperatures. Simply put, there isn't much to fault these cards on at all. They work well, their image quality is immaculate (true angle-independent anisotropic filtering), and



the performance scaling across various resolutions is linear.

Since LCD monitors have largely taken over from the CRT, all of the HD 5000 series cards currently feature HDMI (1.3) output, DisplayPort and the traditional dual-link DVI output [at the least] with full HDCP support for a full-HD experience with multi-monitor support through traditional Hydravision or Eyefinity for supporting cards.

Video encoding and decoding have improved. And we now have full 3D-acceleration speeds in windowed applications as well. In a way, the 5000 series is as refined and balanced a design as one can expect from a core that has its roots in the R600.

Interestingly enough, at the time of writing, the Web was full of pictures of the 5000 series ultra high-end cards - including "Hemlock," which is the X2 version of the 5870, but unlike in previous

generations, is called the 5970 instead of 5870X2. This new SKU will undoubtedly push the price of the rest of the Radeon family down, which can only be good for the consumer.

We looked hard and tried to find something to fault the new series of graphics cards on, but there just isn't anything that the cards get wrong. The performance is great and the pricing is as expected for the most part, even while partially inflated by availability issues. The 5000 series cards are much better than we expected, and will only get better with improved drivers.

As with the 5870, ATI has done a great job with the 5850, 5770 and the 5750 graphics cards. If you're looking for an upgrade for the holiday season, there's very little reason not to buy any of the 5000 series cards - regardless of the price point you're looking to buy at.

**NAG
Neo Sibeko**



5850 and 5750

Bottom Line

Great family of graphics cards that is currently unmatched by anything else on the market.

Plus

- + Performance
- + DirectX 11
- + Image quality

Minus

- Availability



5770

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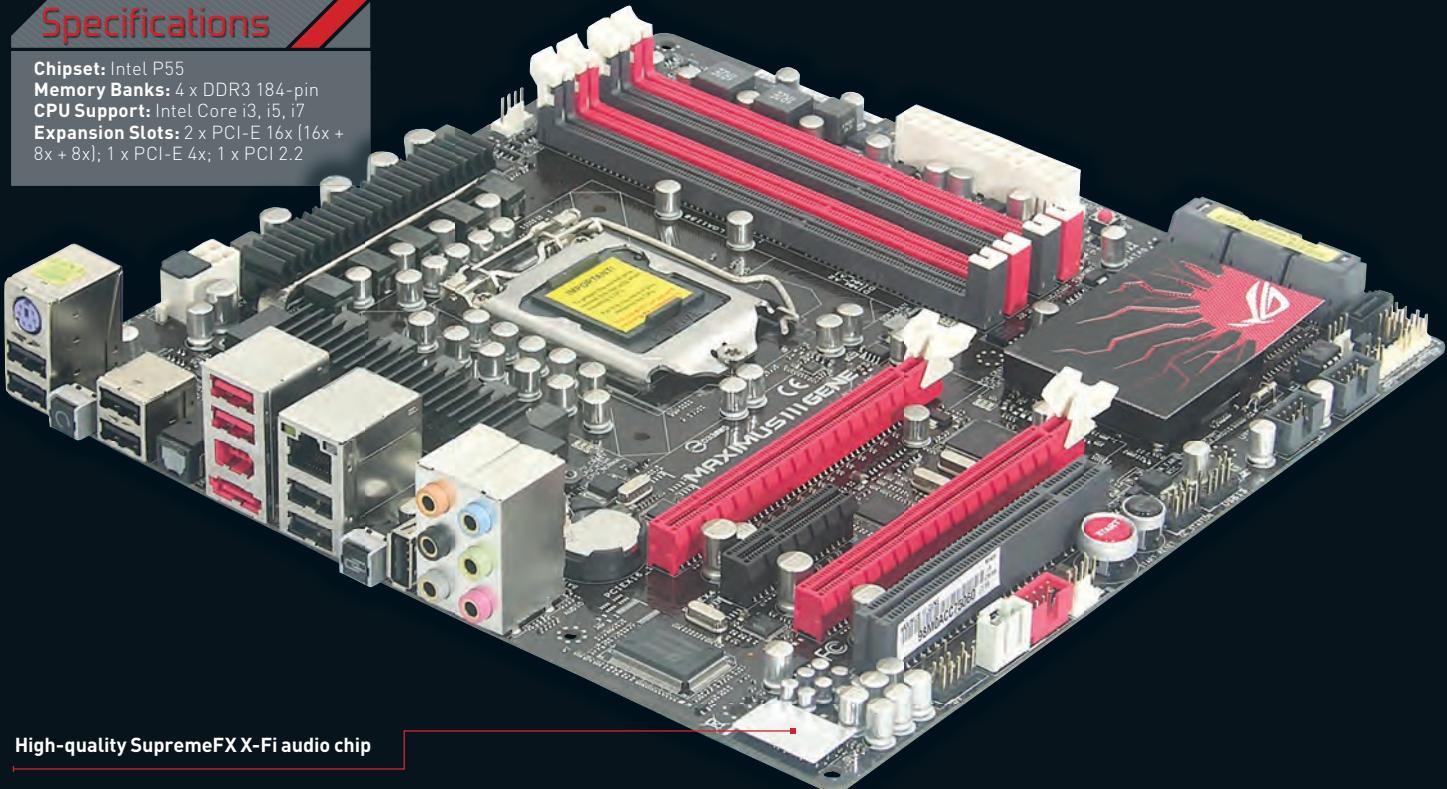
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Specifications

Chipset: Intel P55
Memory Banks: 4 x DDR3 184-pin
CPU Support: Intel Core i3, i5, i7
Expansion Slots: 2 x PCI-E 16x (16x + 8x + 8x); 1 x PCI-E 4x; 1 x PCI 2.2



ASUS Maximus III GENE

DESPITE THE LGA1156 PLATFORM being relatively new, it seems that the market and manufacturers have taken to it much quicker than they did with any other platform. Currently, there's a P55 motherboard - from all the prominent manufacturers - that caters to every price point and user.

ASUS, in particular, has P55 boards that are aimed at all users: from those on a shoestring budget to those who want all the features of the high-end Maximus III GENE board, but in a smaller form factor. The Maximus III GENE, much like the Maximus II GENE, has most of the features of ASUS's standard, ATX-sized motherboards.

The Maximus III GENE is one of the most feature-packed motherboards ever by ASUS. The board supports CrossFire and SLI, and sports an advanced SupremeFX X-Fi audio processor (courtesy of Creative Labs), which supports Alchemy, EAX 4.0 and the usual Dolby digital technologies you'll find on most high-end, on-board audio solutions.

The board itself, being microATX, only features a single PCI Express 4x slot and a single PCI 2.2 slot. It should be noted that neither of these slots would be useable if you employ dual-slot cards for CrossFire or SLI functionality.

What the Maximus III GENE board lacks, which we believe should not be on any modern-day motherboard anyway,

is an IDE connector. Instead, you will find seven SATA ports, six of which are controlled by the controller on all LGA1156 CPUs. The extra SATA port is courtesy of a third-party chip.

The Maximus III GENE, like all other ROG boards, supports the ROG OC Station, and features the usual Start, Clear CMOS and MemOK! buttons. Of particular interest on this motherboard is the ROG Connect feature, which allows the more extreme overclocker to fine-tune and monitor voltages and the like on a notebook. This feature works via a USB at the rear of the motherboard. Using your notebook, you can check POST codes; and if you prefer or don't have a ROG OC Station, you can use your notebook to adjust just about every voltage and frequency on the fly.

This motherboard, despite being positioned as a gamer's motherboard, is actually better suited to overclocking. It may be a microATX board, but the components used are of a very high quality. The board features a 10-phase PWM design for the CPU and dual-phase power for the memory subsystem. This is finer power control than you'd find on other high-end X58 motherboards.

Unfortunately, the price also reflects this, as this board is one of the most expensive microATX boards on the market. In fact, it is only a little cheaper than the bigger Maximus III GENE board,

which it is based on. However, it must be noted that this is not a board that compromises on anything in terms of performance just because it's a microATX board. In fact, it has the exact same performance levels as the other boards in the family.

The BIOS reflects this as well, as CPU-Level Up and all other tweaking features are present. The Maximus III GENE is a tweaker's board - without a doubt. It just happens to be in a microATX form factor and would work equally well in an overclocking bench table as it would in a LAN box.

It's a niche product that will appeal to a limited number of gamers or power users, but those who use it, will be hard-pressed to find anything better on the market, regardless of price. **NAG**
Neo Sibeko



Bottom Line

The best micro-ATX P55 board on the market.

Plus

- + Crossfire/SLI
- + Superior audio controller
- + 10-phase power

Minus

- Price

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Specifications

Weight: 158 grams
Memory: 64MB main memory; 16GB flash memory; Memory Stick Micro M2 input
Display: 3.8-inch widescreen (16:9)
Sound: Built-in stereo speakers/Microphone; Headphone jack
Connectivity: Wi-Fi 802.11b; Bluetooth 2.0; USB 2.0



PSPgo

I'VE NEVER OWNED A PSP. I'd never even held one in my hands until the PSPgo found its way onto my desk. Think of me as a PSP virgin. So, as you read this review, consider my perspective to be entirely fresh and irrefutably awesome. In addition, keep in mind that my knowledge of the technical specifications of Sony's original handheld is based entirely on what I've read (not experienced) about it. The PSPgo is smaller and lighter than the previous iteration of the portable gaming system: the PSP-3000. The screen is also smaller: the PSP-3000 features a 4.3-inch widescreen LCD, while the PSPgo packs a 3.8-inch widescreen display. The size change may irritate owners of the original handheld, but I found the screen's size to be perfect for gaming, watching videos and viewing photos.

The technical specifications of the handheld haven't changed much (aside from the 16GB of on-board flash memory boasted by the PSPgo), meaning that the hardware found in the PSP-3000 and the PSPgo is almost identical. The designers clearly thought things through with the PSPgo – the button placement is almost perfect. It would have been nice if a second analogue stick had been added to the device (making first-person shooters a much more pleasant affair), but that's just nitpicking really. The face buttons are all logically placed on the

underside of the new slider design (the buttons are hidden underneath the screen when the handheld is slid closed). The shoulder buttons are also located on the bottom slide, meaning that your index fingers comfortably rest on the shoulder buttons directly beneath the screen when the handheld is slid open. It really is very comfortable to use.

That 16GB of on-board flash memory is an important facet of the PSPgo and it also introduces us to one of the handheld's greatest strengths. In a country with bandwidth such as ours, however, this strength is also its greatest weakness. You see, Sony has all but removed UMDs from the equation entirely. All of your games must be purchased from the PlayStation Network. This is great if you live in a country with fantastic Internet, but in South Africa (otherwise known as The Land of the Capped), this could pose a problem – depending on your bandwidth situation. This isn't really the handheld's fault, however, and if you have a decent Internet connection, you shouldn't have any problems. In any case, it'll render any UMDs that you may have previously purchased pretty much obsolete. Something that you'll appreciate if you happen to purchase a PSPgo is PSPgo Rewards, which lets you download three games for free from the PSN by

choosing from a list of new and old PSP games. That should alleviate some of the heartache of having your UMDs rendered useless. In addition to this, a new type of game known as PSP Minis will offer cheap games that have a 100MB size limit, which should make things easier for anyone with bandwidth issues.

The PSPgo is a great handheld gaming/multimedia platform. It supports a number of different audio, video and photo formats, meaning that when you're not playing games, the handheld can be used as a portable media player. It doesn't make sense to purchase one if you don't have a decent Internet connection, but for those who do, the PSPgo is sure to keep your portable gaming needs satisfied.

NAG

Dane Remendes



Bottom Line

A great gaming handheld with impressive multimedia functionality. Be aware that the digital downloads will chew your bandwidth.

Plus

- + Compact
- + Comfortable
- + Great design

Minus

- Digital downloads on SA's bandwidth

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Chunky handle is very useful and comfortable, considering the weight you're carrying around

Specifications

5.25-inch Drive Bays (external): 5
3.5-inch Drive Bay (external): 1
3.5-inch Drive Bays (internal): 5
Expansion Slots: 7
Motherboard Support: microATX; ATX
System Fan (front): 1 x 140mm fan
System Fan (rear): 1 x 90mm fan
System Fan (top): 1 x 140mm fan
I/O Ports: 4 x USB 2.0; 1 x eSATA; AC'97 audio



CM Storm Scout

COOLER MASTER, ALWAYS AN enthusiast brand, took it a step further still with the introduction of its Storm line of equipment (in essence, its very own sub-brand, purely for products we would like to use).

CM Storm has released a new chassis, following up on the Sniper and its various iterations. The CM Storm Scout is - as its name suggests - that little bit smaller, lighter, and more nimble, so to speak.

It's still a substantial thing, though, weighing in (without components) at over 8kg. Thankfully, it has a very handy, reinforced, centrally located carry handle at the top. And this isn't one of those skinny handles that cut into your hand: it's wide and flat and very comfortable to use.

In fact, despite the military wording 'peppered' all over the box and marketing material, the Scout is a very friendly case all round. I particularly love the meticulous manner in which they've rounded every exposed sharp ridge in the thing. You will not cut your hands 'building' anything into this machine; which is great!

The PSU is positioned at the bottom of the unit, which is a bit of a problem. You have to install your optical drives last, and then run the risk of them obscuring important components like

the motherboard power connector. Or, even worse, your DIMMs getting in the way if you're building directly into the chassis - as I still like to do. It's the one arrangement aspect that mars the Scout slightly.

Otherwise it is a very good case, with superior cooling provided as standard in the form of two chunky 140mm fans (top and front), supported by a single 90mm one at the rear (although the marketing texts say a 120mm is installed here as standard with the option of 90mm or 80mm units instead). Anyway, together these create more than enough positive airflow to cool almost any configuration.

It's also good to see, along with the standard USB and audio ports, an eSATA port positioned by the front-top IO panel, right beside the big, but disappointingly plasticky, square power button. There's also an additional, smaller power switch here to control your installed LEDs. Well, turn them on or off, at least.

Otherwise, it's fairly standard in here: seven expansion slots, five 5.25-inch bays, five 3.5-inch bays, and the like. CM must be commended for making such sturdy, well-engineered products. Everything fits together perfectly, making for a smooth, hassle-free operation and feels like it'll never bend out of shape to give

you headaches down the line. It also looks good, painted matte black with a large Perspex screen for viewing the guts of your rig.

This quality of construction alone, including that 'finger-friendliness', wins me over though, and is probably worth the price you pay for the Scout. **NAG**

Russell Bennett



Plus

- + Matte-black exterior
- + Hand-friendly edging
- + Strong airflow

Minus

- Optical drives meet with motherboard
- Fairly heavy

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Specifications

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Resolution: 5,600dpi
Buttons: 8 - programmable
Polling Rate: 1,000Hz
Max. Acceleration: 50G



Cooler Master Storm Sentinel Mouse

COOLER MASTER IS WELL known for its PC cases, power supplies, and a few similar products. The company's Storm brand is aimed at gamers, and the Sentinel Advance mouse is Cooler Master's first foray into gaming peripherals. First off, it has been designed with considerable flash – the styling is definitely pitched at gamers, with its lethal matte-black finish and customisable lights. These consist of upper surface lights, as well as forward-facing ones under the buttons, and the two sets are independently adjustable to any of seven colours or off. There are buttons for on-the-fly resolution adjustment, as well as a button to switch profiles (each of which can have its own colour configuration).

The surface is rubberised and has a pleasantly soft feel. The mouse as a whole is rather long, so those with smaller hands may find it difficult to use. It is, in fact, so long that it tends to favour "from the elbow" rather than "from the wrist" use – in other words,

if you like to rest your wrist on the table and mouse with your fingers, you're pretty much out of luck here. A set of weights is included, which can be removed, but even with all of them in, the mouse is fairly light, so it is unlikely you'll be removing any. Unfortunately, there is no side-scrolling (tilting) of the mouse wheel, and the side buttons (again thanks to the mouse's length) are not suited to fingertip play as they can be a bit hard to reach – particularly the one located further away.

One weakness I found is the fact that, when playing on a very smooth surface, the Sentinel sometimes struggles to register small movements. However, this problem did not arise on cloth mouse pads (such as the CS-X Battle Pad DP described in the box out). Overall, this can be considered a very credible gaming mouse, as long as your hands aren't small, and you are prepared to suffer for a week or so while you get used to it and tune it to your exact preferences. **NAG**

Alex Jelagin

CM mouse surfaces

There are a couple of mouse surfaces also available from Cooler Master. The two I had a look at (both in conjunction with the Storm Sentinel Advance mouse, and with another high-end gaming mouse) are the CM Storm HS-M Battle Pad SSK and the CM Storm CS-X Battle Pad DP.

The former is a hard pad "with alloy coating." This coating is slightly textured (in order for optical and laser sensors to have something to work with), yet not so much so as to wear out the 'feet' of a mouse, and is very scratch resistant. It is of an average size, which is to say you'll have ample room without consuming too much desk space, and quite low profile with a rubber backing. It is best for those who prefer low-friction sliding, and those who favour speed in their mouse motions. I found this surface to be an absolute pleasure to play all types of games on – both mice I tried glided effortlessly across it.

The second surface is a flexible cloth-based one that can be rolled up, and is thus suited to being taken to LANs. It is somewhat larger than the Battle Pad SSK, and somewhat thicker, though the majority of players will not find the latter to be an issue. Being cloth-based, this one emphasises fine control and precision over speed, and offers slightly more drag, though it is still quite low-friction. The downside of any cloth pad is cleaning it, but this cannot be avoided. Again, I found myself favouring this surface greatly, particularly for strategy and role-playing games, though it is suited to all types, really.



Bottom Line

A mid- to high-end gaming mouse that is strong on looks, offers good customisability and comfort, and delivers decent performance.

Plus

- + Looks great
- + Comfortable
- + Upgradeable firmware

Minus

- Too big for some

Logitech G13 Advanced Gameboard

LOGETECH HAS A REPUTATION for making quality gaming accessories, and deservedly so. With the G13 Gameboard, the company really takes it to a specialist level. Let's face it: if you have a decent keyboard and mouse, you have everything you need to play typical games (I am not counting fighting games, which are optimal on a console-style controller), so this gameboard, which is an auxiliary keyboard of sorts, is a luxury item. What does it do? It offers a symmetrical keypad with 22 main buttons all arranged around the classic 'WASD' movement configuration in order to be accessible and to maximise the number of keys that can be easily accessed by the off-hand (this device is designed specifically for the left hand). Now here is something important to keep in mind: as well as spending quite a hefty chunk of money, you need to be prepared to also invest some time into training yourself to use the G13 effectively.

As well as the 22 G-keys (which can, of course, be mapped to any keystroke or macro), the G13 has a thumb-stick (which is rather gimmicky – again, unless you



train hard for it, you will find it quite awkward to use) flanked by two buttons. There is also a 'game-panel' monochrome LCD, identical (except for its colour) to that of the (second edition of the) G15 keyboard, which can be used to display system performance info, frame rates, clock, or info from games that specifically support it (there are actually quite a few out there). Finally, there is a comfortable wrist pad at the base, and the cable is very long, so you will never struggle to reach your USB ports.

NAG
Alex Jelagin



Bottom Line

Although a quality product, this gameboard is certainly not a must-have, but rather a luxury and show-off-worthy item.

Plus

- + Comfortable
- + LCD panel
- + Solidly built

Minus

- A gimmick, really

Genius GHP-04DJ Headphones

FIRST OFF, I MUST comment on the choice of marketing for this product: the box claims "professional DJ headphones". To my knowledge, professional DJs tend to use fairly high-end studio-grade stuff. These are not that, so this branding is pure marketing. But don't get me wrong: I'm not saying these are bad; not at all. For a casual home user who wants decent sound at a fairly accessible price, these are just fine. And they look pretty cool, too, with their black and gunmetal grey finish. In terms of comfort, these get it almost right. The ear cushions are quite wide, so they won't press on your ears, which is a good thing; they are also comfortably soft. This factor, however, is offset by the fact that they are a touch too thin, meaning that it is very likely that your ears will end up touching, or even pressing against, the insides of the speakers themselves. For some people who are used to earphones actually on their ears, this won't be an issue, but many of us prefer as little pressure as possible, especially when using them for extended periods of time. The headband cushion, it must be said, is soft and comfortable.

In terms of audio and functionality,



these are pretty sound, if you will pardon the pun. The sound quality is not spectacular, but very solid – clarity is good, as are frequency range and sound separation. The bass response is good at the price. There is an easy-to-use, in-line volume control, and the wire to the 3.5mm stereo jack is satisfactorily long – you won't have any problem reaching to your PC case, even if you connect to the rear of it (unless, of course, you keep your PC case in another room, somehow...).

NAG
Alex Jelagin



Bottom Line

This is a set of fairly comfortable and decent-sounding headphones for general use, or use with a PC.

Plus

- + Reasonably well priced

Minus

- Ear cushions too thin

Specifications

CPU: Core i5-750
RAM: 4GB OCZ DDR3 1,333MHz
GPU: HIS HD 5850
HDD: 500GB
Motherboard: ASUS P7P55D LE
PSU: 650W
Case Type: Mid-tower Cooler Master
Colour: Black and silver
System Fan (front): 1 x 120mm fan
System Fan (rear): 1 x 120mm fan

An excellent machine, although Evetech should perhaps offer a more extremely tuned variant

Evetech Core i5 Gaming Rig

PRETORIA-BASED PROVIDERS OF CUSTOM-BUILT gaming PCs (and other, but we don't care much for them), Evetech have been consistently improving and refining these enthusiast-orientated offerings of theirs and building a decent reputation for themselves among the hardcore gaming fraternity in Gauteng.

But a custom-built gaming rig is expensive, a problem that Evetech believe Intel is addressing at the moment, with mid-range chips like the Core i5, and similarly affordable supporting motherboards becoming available. So the company sent us this latest example of what they're offering, built around a 2.67GHz Core i5-750 CPU, ASUS P7P55D LE motherboard, and a pair of HIS ATI Radeon 4770s running in CrossFire, to see what a reasonable budget can lay its hands on today.

The whole machine is built into a nice Cooler Master CM690 gaming tower chassis, and is very impressively built, with neatly organised cabling inside and all the components securely screwed in. We know, because with the release of the ATI 5850 range, Evetech sent us the HIS version of this GPU to replace the pair of 4770s, for that ultimate high-end punch. While changing GPUs, we also noted the nice OCZ 2GB RAM sticks, for a total of 4GB of DDR3 running at 1,333MHz in this box.

There's a single 500GB HDD, pre-partitioned into a 100GB boot partition and 400GB of storage - a practice I always recommend for various reasons. Windows 7 was pre-installed, although, peculiarly, it was an older release version than the RTM - 7600 - but it did run without any glitches through the test period. The choice of OS will be customer specified anyway.

Before booting the OS, we delved into the BIOS just to see what work Evetech do in this regard, only to find everything set to default positions. Yes, the OCZ RAM was clocked at 1,333MHz thanks to 'the ease of' SPD, but all the voltages were stock. And although the Core i5 has an unlocked clock multiplier, the 750 is by default already at the maximum value of 20 - so no real headroom there.

As a cohesive and balanced gaming platform, this machine is superbly executed. These Core i5 CPUs really are all a gamer needs, provided they're matched to speedy RAM and a decent GPU - both present and accounted for here. Oh, and a PSU that can handle the power draw; in this case, a 650W unit, which was fine but could have become an issue should limitless wallets have allowed for a secondary HD 5850 to be bought and installed.

There is more cooling headroom available in the CM chassis. The Evetech guys went with a pair of big 120mm fans, front and rear, and didn't add additional blowers in the spaces available at the top and bottom. Still, the cooling was more than sufficient for this configuration.

And quite a beast the machine turned out to be - and not just thanks to the monster GPU. 3DMark Vantage returned an impressive result of 12,883. More impressive still, the GPU (12,889) and CPU (12,863) components matched almost perfectly, demonstrating that no system elements were lagging behind, the final result managed by overcompensating on graphics. So CPU-intensive games won't



suffer at all, and GPU-intensive titles have all the performance they need to run at maximum prettiness.

This rig might not boast the 'kudos' of a full-blown Core i7, but it's well built and well executed and makes for a stupendous gaming rig. Sure, the GPU is extremely costly - especially compared to the core components - but it is probably worth it in the end. An excellent job by Evetech putting this system together.

NAG
Russell Bennett



Bottom Line

Well-chosen components; not very much outright customisation, though.

Plus

- + Meticulously put together
- + Well-balanced performer
- + Reasonably quiet

Minus

- Could use more fans
- Doesn't have the street cred of a Core i7

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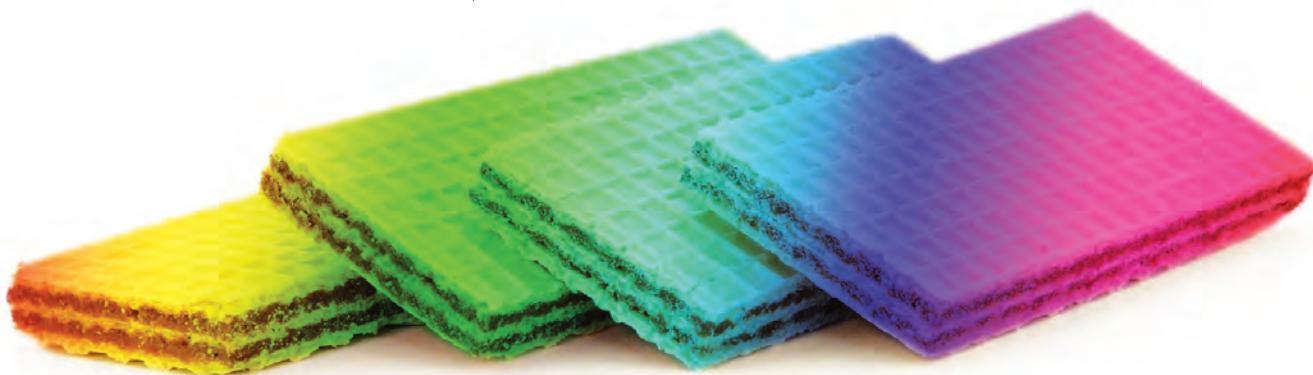
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BY TARRYN VAN DER BYL



Back to the Future

THE GREAT AND TERRIBLE beast December has opened forth – ye! - its greasy, slavering jaws, as the year gathers up its funereal ruff of the finest black velvet and prepares to plunge off the precipice of the present and into the inky abyss of what has been. Which, in this metaphor, is the great and terrible beast December's throat, of course. The precipice is the bottom row of teeth, perhaps, or the tongue. Or maybe a sort of sacrificial rostrum, laid about with wilted lilies, rotted ravens, vintage Darkthrone vinyl, and the other ragged paraphernalia of death. Gnarled and hunched with inscrutable purpose, the Fates huddle in the gloomy corners, the twisted remnants of this year twined about their knotted fingers.

Somewhere in the brooding dusk, a lone wolf howls, its cry a bitter paean to grim certainty. A single tear rolls down the face of someone or something really significant in a really obvious way, like a widowed grandmother or some really unsubtle manifestation of time like a clock. Anyway, the point is that 2009 is just about done. *Ave atque vale*, as Caesar might have said (and pretentious *****'s like me who want to look really intellectual and stuff).

So, roll on 2010. What's next? I tortured a buttermilk rusk and gazed long into the writhing depths of eternity (well, crumbs), and now bring you this true augury of what will surely come to pass.

PC GAMERS WILL FEEL BETRAYED

This further to an industry-wide corporate mandate to relocate gaming permanently onto console and cater exclusively to the two- to five-year "casual" "homosexual" market demographic. Also, every PC on the planet will be seized under warrant by Infinity Ward, emptied out, and used as candy cane dispensers for the two- to five-year old "casual" "homosexual"

market demographic the developer is now so obviously focused on, and because Infinity Ward so obviously hates PC gamers and wants them all to die and pirate their games instead.

CONSOLE GAMERS CONTINUE TO PURSUE A POLICY OF TERMINAL RETARDATION

Deciding which is the better console between the Xbox 360, PS3, and Wii is more important than playing games on any of them. Also, "better" can be absolutely and definitively 'prescribed'.

DIABLO III DELAYED UNTIL 2011

It'll also be delayed until 2012, 2013, and 2014, but not before everyone cancels their pre-orders anyway because of some controversy about dedicated servers or the colour palette or biscuits. Blizzard Activision will merge with EA, and this newly consolidated triumvirate will reveal themselves to be none other than Baal, Mephisto, and Diablo himself pledged to dread purpose and a new Hero Band: The Sims franchise. Nobody will be especially surprised, but someone will file a class action lawsuit on some barely tenable pretext regardless.

THERE WILL BE A NEW FULL THROTTLE AND/OR GRIM FANDANGO GAME ANNOUNCED

I'm only putting this one down so I can gloat about it on the exceedingly unlikely chance that it actually happens. REMEMBER, YOU READ IT HERE FIRST. In the event of this actually happening, of course, that bit about it being "exceedingly unlikely" is just clever, ironic subterfuge. Obviously. **NAG**

7

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